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Episcopacy.

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BY  
REV. D. S. STEPHENS, D. D.,  
EDITOR  
THE METHODIST RECORDER.

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# WESLEY AND EPISCOPACY.

A COLLECTION OF EVIDENCE

SHOWING THAT

John Wesley neither Originated nor Approved  
of Episcopacy in American Methodism.

Reprinted from The Methodist Recorder.

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BY D. S. STEPHENS, D. D.,

Editor of The Methodist Recorder.

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PITTSBURGH:  
METHODIST PROTESTANT PUBLISHING HOUSE.  
1892.

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## PREFACE.

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The series of articles included in this pamphlet appeared in the *Methodist Recorder*, beginning Jan. 19th, 1892. The occasion for the appearance of the articles was as follows : Assertions that John Wesley introduced episcopacy into American Methodism had appeared in the *Christian Advocate*, of New York, and in the *Methodist Review*. The editor of the *Methodist Recorder* ventured to dissent from these statements, and to affirm that documentary evidence could be adduced going to show that Wesley neither originated nor approved of introducing episcopacy into American Methodism. The *Central Christian Advocate*, of St. Louis, then challenged the *Recorder* to produce evidence that would sustain this assertion. The editor of the *Recorder*, unwilling to again go over the ground that had been partly traversed in his reply to Dr. Buckley's affirmation on this point in the *Christian Advocate*, referred the *Central Christian Advocate* to this previous discussion. The *Central Christian Advocate* was not satisfied, and interpreted this reluctance to take up the subject again so soon after having gone over the ground, as a confession of defeat. It contained in its issue of Jan. 6th, 1892, the following :

"The Pittsburgh *Methodist Recorder* having affirmed that Mr. Wesley disapproved of the episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church as established at its organization, and that 'documentary evidence' could be produced to sustain its position, we challenged it 'to produce a line from the pen of John Wesley against the episcopal form of church government.' Instead of making good its boast it changes the issue and challenges us to produce anything from Mr. Wesley in favor of the episcopacy established here. This is a miserable retreat, and shows just how much such assertions as the *Recorder* makes on this subject are worth.

"The *Recorder* knows that Mr. Wesley prepared the forms of ordination which were used at the organization of American Methodism by taking those of the *Episcopal Church of England*, with slight alteration that does not affect their essential character. The form used for the ordination of bishop is the same as that for bishop in the English Church, only he called the person so ordained a 'superintendent.' And he always explains this word 'superintendent' by referring to the Greek word which is translated bishop in the New Testament. The *Recorder* knows, too, that Charles Wesley and those who were opposed to any separation from the Church of England always accused Mr. Wesley of ordaining Coke a bishop and of setting up an episcopal Church in this country. Neither of the Wesleys believed in the Presbyterian form of Church government.

"The letters that passed between John Wesley and his brother Charles in regard to the ordination of

Dr. Coke show plainly that John Wesley knew exactly what Dr. Coke had done. The sermon preached by Dr. Coke defending his course is referred to in the letters, but Mr. Wesley does not say, or intimate, that Dr. Coke had exceeded his instructions. He criticised the spirit of Coke and Asbury in the office of superintendent, but he never criticised the polity itself. Had he believed in Presbyterian forms he would not have ordained Dr. Coke, who was already a presbyter, as the preparatory step for ordaining the American Methodist preachers.

“We renew our challenge. Let the *Recorder* produce its ‘documentary evidence’ that Mr. Wesley disapproved of the church government of the Methodist Episcopal Church.”

Having been called again to the discussion of this subject the editor of the *Recorder* determined to give a thorough presentation of evidence and argument bearing on this point. The result was the series of articles herewith presented, with a few slight changes. Friends reading these articles, and believing that they contained historical facts of value bearing on this question, requested their preparation in such form that they could be preserved and used for general circulation. In answer to this demand this pamphlet has been prepared.

In this discussion we have confined ourselves to the one point of the historical relation of Wesley to episcopacy in American Methodism. Of the merits of episcopacy in itself we say nothing. This is another and a distinct question.

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# WESLEY AND EPISCOPACY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DID JOHN WESLEY ORDAIN DR. COKE A BISHOP?

The position which we shall endeavor to maintain in this pamphlet is that the plan on which the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in America was not the production of Wesley, but was the work of Francis Asbury and Dr. Coke. There are several points involved in the ecclesiastical device which Asbury and Coke wrought out, which we shall endeavor to show had no countenance from Wesley and were, on the other hand, the objects of his expressed disapproval.

That Wesley had some plan according to which he intended the American societies should be conducted is obvious. But we hold that the episcopal system instituted by Asbury and Coke does not correspond to the purposes Wesley had in view. Wesley affirms that he had prepared an outline of the plan that he intended should be pursued. In his letter of September 10, 1784, to "Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury and our brethren in North America," he says :

“In this peculiar situation some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice; and in compliance with these desires I have drawn up a little sketch.”

Anything that would answer to the “little sketch” here referred to has never come to the light. It has been claimed that the letter in which this expression occurs itself was the “little sketch” referred to. But this we think can hardly be the case. This letter is mainly an explanation and defense of his ordination of Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as elders for the American Methodists, and the appointment of Dr. Coke and Francis Asbury as joint superintendents. It contains no outline of a plan as a basis for the organization of the American Methodists. Whatever Mr. Wesley’s plan may have been, his statement was never made public. His ideas and purposes with regard to the basis of the organization for the American societies were made known only so far as they were communicated through the mediumship of Dr. Coke.

The fact that Wesley’s plan has never been fully disclosed has been admitted by at least one notable Methodist Episcopal writer. Bishop S. M. Merrill, D. D., in the *Daily Christian Advocate*, published at Omaha, Nebraska, May 2, 1892, says :

“The contents of Mr. Wesley’s plan of organization are not known in detail, but it is understood that he contemplated the consecration of Mr. Asbury as General Superintendent, very much as it occurred, but on his own appointment.”

In another place in the same article Bishop Merrill says :

“Mr. Wesley preferred the Episcopal form of Church government, and intended to establish it for his people here, according to a plan which he outlined, and with which he made

Dr. Coke acquainted, and probably placed a copy of it in his hand. What a privilege it would be to see that plan as drawn by Wesley."

The plan proposed by Asbury and Coke, and adopted by the Conference of 1784, had several features, however, which we will try to show were contrary to Wesley's wishes and designs. The ecclesiastical system devised by Asbury and Coke involved points of departure against which we have Wesley's explicit protest.

That we may present in a connected manner the material we have accumulated on this subject we shall consider several of the points involved in succession. The first and most important fact bearing upon this subject is the appointment of Dr. Coke to the superintendency of the American societies by Mr. Wesley. If the significance of this ceremony of appointment can be determined, it will throw light upon all subsequent events. If Mr. Wesley intended this as the initial step of an episcopal system, as has been claimed, then all of Dr. Coke's subsequent doings are justified. If it had no such import, then Dr. Coke stands forth as having misused the trust imposed upon him. We begin, therefore, by asking the following question :

*1. Did Mr. Wesley, in the appointment of Dr. Coke as superintendent invest him with episcopal authority?*

This point really is the key to the situation. If in the appointment of Dr. Coke to superintend the American societies Wesley did not intend to confer upon him episcopal powers, then the assumption of the title of bishop by Coke and Asbury, and their es-

tablishment of a psuedo-episcopal church become impertinences. Whatever authority Dr. Coke possessed came from Wesley. He admittedly was but the agent to carry out Wesley's designs. Wesley's intentions, therefore, in investing Coke with authority to carry out the plan he had prepared for him must be accepted as the criterion by which Dr. Coke's subsequent pretensions and acts must be judged.

In appointing Dr. Coke as superintendent jointly with Francis Asbury, Wesley evidently did not intend to create an episcopal system. He intended simply to transfer the right of governing to the delegated person, with a view to overcome the objections which might possibly be offered if any attempt was made to govern without Wesley's consent. Wesley calls it "investing the doctor with fuller powers."

The ceremony of laying on of hands was evidently the result of Dr. Coke's importunity rather than of Wesley's deliberate judgment. Whitehead, in his "Life of Wesley," says, in speaking of Mr. Wesley's indisposition to take this step:

"In this purpose, however, he appeared so languid, if not wavering, that Dr. Coke thought it necessary to use some further means to urge him to the performance of it."

Dr. Coke therefore sent a letter to Wesley giving reasons why he should receive authority to ordain others from Wesley by "the imposition of hands." Among these reasons he names, (1) "That it seems to me the most Scriptural way," and (2) "I may want all the influence in America which you can throw into the scale."

Under this pressure Wesley was led to go through

a form of ordination. But that he did not regard this ceremony as instituting an episcopal form of government for the American societies is apparent. In the very letter of September 10, 1784, in which he communicates his action to the "brethren of North America," he declares his disbelief in the theory of episcopal ordination. He says in this letter :

"Lord King's account of the primitive church convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain."

Had it been Wesley's intention to create an episcopacy, he would not have disavowed the principle which is the very foundation stone of the episcopal system. To establish an episcopacy which shall be consistent with ordination by presbyters is an incongruity that can be explained only by the presence of an overweening ambition for episcopal dignities that shuts its eyes to all absurdities and inconsistencies that stand in the way of aspiring vanity.

The act of imposition of hands can not be taken as evidence that this ceremony had the character of episcopal ordination, for Wesley in his Works (Vol X., page 257) says that the rite of laying on of hands is one which is used not in ordination only, but in blessing and on many other occasions.

Coke was an ordained presbyter in the Church of England, just as was Wesley himself. And he had as much right to ordain Wesley to episcopal authority as Wesley had to ordain Coke in that sense. To regard this ceremony as anything more than the signification that Wesley delegated Coke to govern the American societies in his place is to involve him in a maze of

absurdities. That this view is correct, we cite an historical authority in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Dr. John Atkinson, the author of the "Centennial History of Methodism," has carefully gone over this ground, and as the result of his investigation, he says :

"The ordination of Coke was not, as Wesley understood it, episcopal, according to the ordinary signification of that term, but presbyterial ; and as Coke's letter to Wesley suggests, it was apparently meant to provide against the criticisms and opposition which the exercise of the ordaining power by Coke might possibly provoke in America."

Again Dr. Atkinson speaks upon this same subject in terms that can not be misunderstood :

"From all that appears in Wesley's utterances in relation to this matter, he did not intend to make Coke a bishop." "He certainly did not mean to engraft its substance (*i. e.*, episcopacy) into the Methodism of the western hemisphere."

"His simple purpose seems to have been to provide the holy sacrament for the numerous Methodists in the United States by means of a presbyterial superintendency."

That the ordination of Dr. Coke invested him with no authority different from that received by the members of the British Conference who succeeded Mr. Wesley in the government of British Methodists is evident. He gave to them all the authority that he ever conferred upon Dr. Coke. Yet they never dreamed of assuming episcopal authority because Wesley had deputed to them the authority of government which he possessed in his life. On this point Nicholas Snethen says :

"The hundred successors of Mr. Wesley who compose the British Conference unite in themselves all the powers and func-


tions that are exercised by our General Conference and superintendents. They are all bishops *de facto*. Our ordination conveys nothing which Mr. Wesley did not give to them."

The truth is that the assumption of episcopal authority is accounted for only by the ambition and vanity of Coke and Asbury. Coke's overweening aspirations led him to unconsciously or purposely misrepresent Wesley's wishes in this matter. Rev. Henry Moore, in his "Life of Wesley," says of Dr. Coke's character in this respect:

"He was, as his biographer acknowledges, naturally ambitious and aspiring; and for some years had made great efforts to obtain preferment in the church."

We have, however, from Wesley's own pen that which shows beyond cavil to any open mind that Wesley had no thought of conferring episcopal authority on Dr. Coke. Sometime after, when it reached Wesley's ears that Asbury and Coke had assumed episcopal power, he wrote the now famous letter of rebuke to Asbury for his assumption of episcopal airs. This letter did not come to light for years after Wesley's death. Asbury never revealed it. Dr. Coke, who had access to Wesley's papers, undoubtedly knew of it, but in his "Life of Wesley" it is suppressed. Had not Moore, in his later "Life of Wesley," brought it to light, it might never have become known. It was written from London, September 20, 1788, to Francis Asbury ("Moore's Life of Wesley," Vol. II., page 202), and runs as follows:

"There is indeed a wide difference between the relation wherein you stand to the Americans, and the relation wherein I stand to all Methodists. You are the elder brother of the American Methodists; I am, under God, the father of the whole



family. Therefore I naturally care for you all in a manner no other person can do. Therefore, I, in a measure, provide for you all; for the supplies which Dr. Coke provides for you he could not provide, were it not for me—were it not that I not only permit him to collect, but also support him in so doing.

“But in one point, my dear brother, I am a little afraid both the doctor (Dr. Coke) and you differ from me. I study to be little; you study to be great. I creep; you strut along. I found a school, you a college! Nay, and call it after your own names. O beware! Do not seek to be something! Let me be nothing and Christ all in all. One instance of this, your greatness, has given me great concern. How can you, how dare you suffer yourself to be called a bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought. Men may call me a knave or a fool, a rascal, and I am content; but they shall never, by my consent, call me a bishop. For my sake, for God’s sake, for Christ’s sake, put a full end to this. Let the Presbyterians do what they please, but let the Methodists know their calling better. Thus, my dear Franky, I have told you all that is in my heart, and let this, when I am no more seen, bear witness how sincerely I am your affectionate friend and brother.

“JOHN WESLEY.”

This letter never can be explained consistently with the theory that Wesley intended to confer episcopal power on Dr. Coke. No amount of torture with words can make it “square” with the notion that Wesley was intending to establish a system of episcopacy in American Methodism. If Wesley had recommended an “episcopacy in fact” under the name of superintendent, it would have been unreasonable for him to write to Asbury in terms of such caustic severity as he did. A mere substitution of one term for another never could have drawn forth such a letter. Wesley was not a man to quibble over mere terms. We cannot think that a man of his directness and candor



would recommend "episcopacy in fact" but object in the strongest conceivable manner to the use of the appropriate terms for designating the episcopal office. Wesley was always concerned about realities, not terms. "I dispute not about words," he tersely said on one occasion. And to assume that this violent outburst was directed solely against the use of a term does no credit either to Wesley's honesty or his judgment. Such a letter as this, on the supposition that Wesley intended to institute an "episcopacy in fact" for American Methodism, would be an evidence of aberration of mind to the point of insanity.

Nor are we alone in this interpretation of Wesley's letter. Dr. Atkinson, to whom we have before referred, a Methodist Episcopal writer, in his "Centennial History of Methodism," gives his conviction as to the meaning of this letter.

"In the presence of such declarations, and of such an outburst of indignant affection, it would be uncandid to say that Mr. Wesley constituted Dr. Coke a bishop, or that an episcopate, in the established sense of that word, was the product of his brain and heart. All that he ever gave to the American Methodists, in this particular, was a simple superintendency, subject to his guidance and control, and the tenure of which was limited by his pleasure. When it became other than that, it ceased to be the superintendency of Wesley."

Again Dr. Atkinson declares on this point:

"If Wesley contemplated an episcopate, and considered Asbury a bishop, by virtue of Coke's ordination, it is inexplicable that he should have shuddered at his being designated by the name. The thing and the name belong of right to each other."

In the light of this testimony it must be conceded that it was farthest from Wesley's thoughts to make Dr. Coke and Asbury bishops.

## CHAPTER II.

### WAS DR. COKE FAITHFUL TO WESLEY'S INSTRUCTIONS?

In the last chapter we endeavored to present evidence going to show that Wesley did not intend to induct Dr. Coke into the episcopal office in his appointment as superintendent, in Mr. Wesley's place, of the American societies. We noted that the ceremony accompanying the appointment was more at Coke's importunity than Wesley's deliberate choice ; that Wesley disclaimed belief in episcopal ordination in the very letter through which he informed the "brethren in North America" of what he had done ; that if the appointment of Dr. Coke was episcopal ordination, then the hundred successors of Mr. Wesley in the British Conference were also ordained bishops ; that the acknowledged vanity and ambition of Coke and Asbury explained the assumption of episcopal authority ; that Wesley's famous letter to Asbury was irreconcilable with the supposition that Coke and Asbury had been episcopally ordained ; and, finally, that candid authorities in the Methodist Episcopal Church have admitted that these facts make untenable the theory that Wesley intended to make Dr. Coke a bishop.

We now advance a step further. Leaving the circumstances attendant upon the appointment of Dr. Coke, let us inquire how Dr. Coke acquitted himself in the performance of the duty with which Wesley entrusted him regarding the government of the American societies. Dr. Coke acted simply in the capacity of Wesley's agent. He came to America avowedly as Mr. Wesley's representative, to carry out the instructions given him, having accepted whatever authority he possessed at Wesley's hands. The next inquiry we make, therefore, will be the following :

2. *Was Dr. Coke faithful to the instructions given him by Wesley ?*

Wesley undoubtedly had a "plan," according to which he intended the American Methodists to be governed. He refers to this "plan" on several occasions, and says that he had prepared a "little sketch," setting it forth. This "plan" was committed to Dr. Coke to be communicated to the American brethren.

Just how far Dr. Coke presented Wesley's wishes to Mr. Asbury and the American preachers cannot now be fully known. Enough is known, however, to make it clear that Dr. Coke did not fully and correctly represent Wesley's views.

In the first place, the documents in the possession of Dr. Coke were not properly placed before the conference. Among the papers given to Dr. Coke was a letter of appointment from Wesley. This letter began thus :

"Whereas many of the people in the southern provinces of North America who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, etc."

The beginning of this letter indicated Wesley's purpose that American Methodists should remain under his authority and continue under the "doctrine and discipline of the Church of England." Such a purpose would not have been in harmony with the creation of an independent Episcopal Church. This letter was not made known to the American preachers by Dr. Coke. It did not come to light until years after the Christmas Conference of 1784.

We have already noticed that nothing corresponding to the "little sketch," to which Wesley referred, was placed before the American preachers. Wesley alludes on several occasions to a "plan," a "little sketch," etc., containing an outline of his purposes respecting the government of American Methodists, but what that was can only be inferred from utterances on other occasions, and the development of subsequent events.

Furthermore, the letter of September 10th, addressed to "Dr. Coke, Francis Asbury and the brethren in North America," was not given to the Conference of 1784 in full. In the minutes of the British Conference it is found that a paragraph appears that was omitted in the version presented to the American Methodists. It had reference to the use of a liturgy, and runs as follows :

"And I have prepared a liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England (I think the best constituted national church in the world), which I advise all the travelling preachers to use on the Lord's day, in all the congregations, reading the litany on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days."

Why was this paragraph suppressed? It will be

observed that this paragraph implies that American Methodists should remain in close connection with the Church of England. It would, therefore, not be in harmony with the establishment of an independent episcopacy, such as Coke and Asbury desired to have established among American Methodists. This paragraph, like the letter of appointment for Dr. Coke, would be inconsistent with the idea that Wesley intended an independent Episcopal Church for the American Methodists; and this inconvenient paragraph disappeared.

Whatever the explanation, the paragraph failed to appear in the minutes of the American Conference of 1784.

These facts, all taken together, make evident that Wesley's purpose could have been but imperfectly apprehended by the famous Christmas Conference. They furnish a basis on which Alexander McCaine, in his "Defence of the Truth," charges Coke with perverting Wesley's purposes. McCaine in his book says:

"If there was no design on the part of Dr. Coke to depart from Mr. Wesley's instructions, why did he suppress one document entirely, mutilate a second and destroy a third? He could not say he was ignorant of Mr. Wesley's design; for the disposition of these documents is proof that he understood them well, and that they were adverse to his ambitious designs and prospects. And besides the instructions which these papers contained, we are told by Rev. Henry Moore, Mr. Wesley's biographer, 'that the doctor was enjoined in the most solemn manner not to take on himself the title of bishop.' And yet, notwithstanding the pains which Mr. Wesley took to set forth the nature of the office to which the doctor was appointed, and the extent of his authority with which he was invested, the very first thing he did was contrary to Mr. Wesley's instructions, by

adopting episcopacy and imposing an episcopal form of government on the Methodist societies in America, under the sanction of Mr. Wesley's name."

But not alone do the facts relating to the documents intrusted to him show that he failed to follow Wesley's instructions. Testimony from various sources corroborates this. Expressions from Wesley himself and others show this fact.

Rev. Henry Moore in his "Life of Wesley," speaks emphatically of the way in which Dr. Coke misrepresented Wesley's wishes. Mr. Moore says, speaking of Coke's assumption of episcopal dignities :

"In this and every similar deviation, I can not be the apologist of Dr. Coke ; and I can state, in contradiction to all that Dr. Whitehead and Mr. Hampson have said, that Mr. Wesley never gave his sanction to any of these things ; nor was he the author of one line of all that Dr. Coke published in America on this subject. His views on these points were very different from those of his zealous son in the gospel. He knew that a work of God neither needed nor could be truly aided, nor could recommend itself to pious minds, by such additions."

This is very direct evidence that Coke was not faithful to the instructions Wesley had given him.

Tyerman quotes a letter from Pawson, a Methodist preacher, sent to Scotland in 1857, who says :

"Wesley, a few months before his death, was so annoyed with Dr. Coke's conduct in persuading the people to depart from his original plan that he threatened in a letter to have no more to do with him, unless he desisted from such a procedure."

Here we have direct testimony that Coke did depart from Wesley's "plan." Indeed there is every evidence to believe that the course of Asbury and Dr. Coke was the occasion of grief to Wesley. Asbury

himself noticed this, and in a letter to Benson said in regard to Wesley, "It appeared we had lost his confidence entirely."

Freeborn Garretson, a prominent member of the conference of 1784, testifies that Wesley expressed to him his dissatisfaction with the course taken by Dr. Coke. He says :

"We were grieved for the rejection of Wesley's appointments, and for the loss of his name from our yearly minutes. After Dr. Coke returned to England, I received a letter from Mr. Wesley, in which he spoke freely. He was dissatisfied with three things: the rejection of his appointments; the substitution of the word bishop for superintendent; and the discontinuance of his name from our minutes."

Is not this enough to show that Coke and Asbury went far beyond the instructions and wishes of Wesley in entailing episcopacy upon American Methodism? But we have the declaration of Coke himself upon this point. As time went on, because his conscience smote him, or for some other reason, he made this admission in a letter to Bishop White, of the Protestant Episcopal Church, on April 24, 1791 :

"I am not now sure but that I went farther in the separation of our church in America than Mr. Wesley, from whom I received my commission, did intend. He did, indeed, solemnly, invest me, so far as he had a right so to do, with episcopal authority, but did not intend, I think, that our entire separation should take place. This I am certain of, that he (Wesley) is now sorry for the separation."

Here Dr. Coke specifically admits that he deviated from Wesley's "plan." True, he does so in a sort of a doubtful way, but the fact of his consciousness that he had not faithfully carried out Wesley's purpose is none the less apparent.

It might be urged in Dr. Coke's defense, that he innocently misapprehended Wesley's purposes, and failed to correctly present them because of his own imperfect understanding of them. Even this defense can not be left to the doctor. The withholding of the documents referred to does not sustain this view. Furthermore, Henry Moore, in his "Life of Wesley" testifies to Dr. Coke's willful violation of Wesley's directions in at least one point. It appears that Wesley had some forebodings of Dr. Coke's itching for episcopal dignities. He had misgivings as to the lengths to which Coke's ambitions might lead him; for, according to Moore's testimony, Wesley solemnly enjoined him to refrain from assuming episcopal powers. Mr. Moore says in his *Life of Wesley*, Vol. II., p. 198 :

"With respect to the title of bishop, I know that Mr. Wesley enjoined the doctor and his associates, and in the most solemn manner, that it should not be taken. In a letter to Mrs. Gilbert, the widow of the excellent Nathaniel Gilbert, Esq., of Antigua, a copy of which now lies before me, he states this in the strongest manner."

Here Mr. Moore testifies that a letter in his possession written by Wesley states that he, Wesley, "in the most solemn manner," specifically forbade the use of this episcopal designation, and that he warned him against allowing his ambitions to lead in this direction, and yet Dr. Coke disregarded these injunctions. This fact alone would establish the charge that Dr. Coke disregarded Wesley's authority when the object of his ambitions was at stake.

In the light of all this evidence it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than that Dr. Coke



knowingly and purposely deviated from the instructions of Mr. Wesley. Notwithstanding that he had been specifically directed by Wesley to refrain from assuming episcopal dignities, he set aside these instructions, and did what Wesley had in the "strongest manner" forbidden. In this respect, and in others, it is apparent that he disregarded the known wishes of Mr. Wesley.

### CHAPTER III.

#### DID WESLEY APPROVE EITHER OF THE NAME OR OF THE SUBSTANCE OF EPISCOPACY ?

So far we have considered two points. First, we adduced evidence to show that Wesley, in the appointment of Dr. Coke as superintendent of the American Methodist societies, had no thought of making Dr. Coke a bishop. The evidence upon this point is so clear that we can not apprehend that any one will be found to dispute it. Second, we raised the question, Did Dr. Coke faithfully carry out Wesley's instructions ? In the light of the facts presented, no other conclusion would be possible than that Dr. Coke's insatiable ambitions, with whatever influences may have been brought to bear upon him by Asbury, led him to refrain from giving American Methodists a full understanding of Wesley's desires. We noted how the documents placed in Dr. Coke's hands by Wesley were suppressed, or given in an imperfect form, when it would militate against Coke's and Asbury's plans to have them given in full. We noted, further, the testimony of a number of witnesses to the effect that Wesley was grieved because Coke and Asbury had broken away from his instructions. Finally we had Dr.

Coke's own admissions that he had not faithfully followed out Wesley's directions. In the face of all the testimony given it is doubtful if any one would have the hardihood to claim that the ecclesiastical structure launched by Coke and Asbury was in accord with Wesley's designs.

We must regard it, therefore, as established that the episcopal system instituted by Coke and Asbury essentially was at variance with Wesley's desires at several points. Its very character as an episcopacy necessarily brought it into antagonism with Wesley's plans in various way. Some of the features growing out of its episcopal character which Wesley disapproved were as follows : 1. He disapproved of the name Methodist Episcopal Church ; 2. He disapproved of episcopal orders, and the episcopal nomenclature ; 3. He disapproved the withdrawal from his authority ; 4. He disapproved of separation from the Established Church ; 5. He did not intend that Coke and Asbury should have a life tenure of office.

It will be observed that had Wesley intended to organize the American societies on an episcopal basis, all the points above enumerated would necessarily have been approved. They are logically the consequences of a system of episcopacy. To disapprove of them is to disapprove essentially of the episcopal system, because with an episcopal polity, they naturally follow, and without such a polity they could have no existence. If, therefore, Wesley opposed these features, it becomes clear that he did not intend to introduce episcopacy into American Methodism. And that he did disapprove of the work of Asbury

and Coke at these points we shall endeavor to show.

In the present article we shall take up the inquiry:

3. *Did Wesley approve either of the name or of the substance of episcopacy for American Methodists?*

First, in regard to the name given to the church which Coke and Asbury organized, it is evident that Wesley was highly displeased by their assumption of the title of an Episcopal Church. Had Wesley favored the introduction of the essential features of episcopacy into the American societies, he never would have been offended at the use of the name. As we have stated in another place, Wesley was not the man to quibble over terms. He was direct and outspoken in all his dealings with men. To attribute to him the purpose of establishing an episcopal church in America, and yet a manifest aversion to giving this church a name expressive of its real character, is to credit him with a trait of character that was not his.

The name Methodist Episcopal Church was suggested by John Dickins at the Christmas conference, in 1784, in Baltimore. Thomas Ware, one of the members of that conference, says that "Dr. Coke was in favor of taking the name of Methodist Episcopal Church" and "argued that the plan of general superintendency was in fact a species of episcopacy." If Wesley had suggested this name, there would have been no need of justifying it on the ground that the superintendency was a species of episcopacy anyway. The ambition of Dr. Coke and Asbury would have seized hold of this at once as sufficient reason without the necessity of any such far-fetched argument.

Dr. Coke's course with reference to the choice of a name for the new organization betrays a conscious knowledge of the fact that he was departing from Wesley's instructions in this matter. He even left the impression on some of the members of the conference that Wesley did not want this name. Thomas Ware, a member of the conference of 1784, in a letter of December 1, 1828, said :

" I am fully persuaded the preachers in 1784 believed they were acting in accordance with the will of Mr. Wesley when they adopted the episcopal form, or the plan of the general superintendency. This plan we knew Mr. Wesley approved, and *we called it episcopal. I did not believe Mr. Wesley wished us to give it that appellation.*"

Coke had evidently left the impression on the minds of the conference that Wesley, while desiring to entail the substance of episcopacy upon American Methodists, yet had scruples in regard to the name chosen. Yet in the same letter in which Thomas Ware declares that he had received the impression that Wesley did not wish us "to give it that appellation" he goes on to say that " Dr. Coke was in favor of taking the name, Methodist Episcopal Church." Here we have evidence, then, at the very outset, that Dr. Coke at the prompting of his ambitious desires was ready to set aside Wesley's known wishes. That Wesley did not want this name was no obstacle in the way of its assumption, even though Dr. Coke avowedly was but an agent to carry out Wesley's wishes.

This name assumed by the conference of 1784 at Dr. Coke's and Asbury's suggestion was never used by Wesley. He never recognized it. In all the references subsequently made to American Methodists

he scrupulously avoided designating the American societies as the Methodist Episcopal Church. Tyerman in his "Life and Times of Wesley" says:

"We have no fault to find with the American Methodists being called the Methodist Episcopal Church. They have the fullest right to such a designation if they choose to use it; but it was a name which Wesley never used.

Tyerman's declaration on this point is abundantly sustained by corroborative evidence. Wesley never approved of the name, Methodist Episcopal Church.

Secondly, Wesley disapproved of the episcopal order assumed by Coke and Asbury, and of the episcopal designation.

In the very letter which Coke bore to the American brethren, Wesley declares himself in antagonism to the episcopal theory of orders, and therefore essentially opposed to episcopacy itself. In this letter he says:

"Lord King's account of the primitive Church convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain."

Wesley's view on the question of presbyterial ordination and episcopal pretensions in general is very explicit, and is expressed over and over again in his works. He thus comments on the word bishop:

"The word bishops here includes all the presbyters at Philippi, as well as the ruling presbyters; the name bishop and presbyter or elder being promiscuously used in the first ages." — *Wesley's Notes. (Phil. 1 ch., 1 v.)*

On episcopal pretensions in general Wesley thus expresses himself:

"Concerning diocesan episcopacy there are several questions I should be glad to have answered. 1st. Where is it prescribed in Scripture? 2d. How does it appear that the apostles settled it

in all the churches they planted? 3d. How does it appear that they so settled it in any, as to make it of perpetual obligation?"—*Wesley, Vol. 16, page 35.*

He claimed to be a bishop according to the scriptural meaning of the term. He says:

"I firmly believe that I am a scriptural *episcopos* as much as any man in England or in Europe; for the uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable which no man ever did or can prove."—*Letter to Charles Wesley, August 19, 1785.*

The equality of bishops and elders was a conclusion to which Wesley was driven against the prejudices of his early education. He says:

"I read over Lord King's account of the primitive church. In spite of the vehement prejudices of my education, I was ready to believe that this is a fair and impartial draught. But if so, it would follow that bishops and presbyters are essentially of one order; and that every Christian congregation was a church independently of all others."—*Wesley's Journal, January 20, 1746.*

Again he refers to his claims as an *episcopos* as follows:

"When I said I consider myself a scriptural bishop as much as any man in England or Europe, I spoke on Lord King's supposition that bishops and presbyters are the same order."

Wesley's idea of a bishop was one who was pastor of a congregation, as distinguished from an evangelist. He says:

"A bishop or pastor of a congregation."—*Wesley's Notes. (1 Tim. 3 ch., 2 v.)*

At another place he notes the identity of bishops and presbyters, as follows:

"Likewise the deacons must be serious. But where are the presbyters? Were this order essentially distinct from that of bishops, would the apostle have passed it over in silence?"—*Wesley's Notes. (1 Tim. 3 ch., 8 v.)*

These quotations, and others that might be presented, show very conclusively where John Wesley stood on the question of episcopacy. No one was farther from accepting the episcopal view of the Christian ministry, or from asserting the episcopal theory of ordination which is the foundation stone of an episcopal church. On this point he maintained radically different ground from that occupied by Asbury and Coke. They were in direct antagonism to this frequently reiterated view of Wesley's.

This theory of presbyterial ordination is irreconcilable with the episcopal view accepted by Asbury and Coke. Asbury held that the bishop was of a distinct and separate order. He sets forth his view in regard to the separate order of the elder and bishop in the following words :

"But they say we are the same order, then why not the same name in Greek and English? Why not deacons and bishops of the same order? This all churches agree in, they are not. It is an easy matter for our brethren, members and ministers to move in narrow circles, to talk to little purpose."

Here is a direct antagonism between the view of John Wesley and Asbury. Asbury held to one doctrine on this point and Wesley to another. It is not surprising, therefore, that the view held by Asbury was the one pressed upon American Methodists.

On another occasion in his journal Asbury gave expression to this high view of the episcopate as follows :

"There is not, nor, indeed, in my mind, can there be perfect equality between a constant president and those over whom he always presides."



Asbury and Coke were too discreet to avow direct antagonism to Wesley's view at the outset. The American Methodists revered Wesley, and ambitious as Asbury and Coke were, they did not at once dare to throw off allegiance to him, and declare their purpose to depart from his instruction on this matter. As soon, however, as they felt themselves secure in their position at the head of American Methodism, they did not hesitate to declare their views in opposition to those of Wesley. Southey, in his "Life of Wesley," says:

"The name of superintendent, and the notion that bishops and presbyters were the same order, were now laid aside; they were mere pretexts, and had served the purpose for which they were intended."

They were ready to avow their true purpose, obscurely seen at the outset, as soon as it was apparent they could do it with safety. Three years after the conference of 1784 Coke and Asbury felt secure enough in their positions to openly repudiate all responsibility to Wesley. At the conference of 1787 they struck Wesley's name off of the minutes, and inserted the word bishop in the place of the word superintendent in the minutes. Rev. Jesse Lee, in his "History of the Methodists," observes on this point.

"This was the first time (1787) that our superintendents ever gave themselves the title of bishops in the minutes. They changed the title themselves, without the consent of the conference; and then at the next conference they asked the preachers if the word bishop might not stand in the minutes, seeing it was a Scripture name, and the meaning of the word bishop was the same with that of superintendent. Some of the preachers opposed the alteration, and wished to retain the former title, but a majority of the preachers agreed to let the word bishop remain."

Of this same change in the minutes, by which the last pretense of following Wesley's wishes was discarded, Freeborn Garretson, a member of the conference of 1784, says :

“ Mr. Wesley gave us the word ‘superintendent’ instead of ‘bishop,’ and the change of the word was the cause of grief to that dear old saint, and so it was to me.”

The system of episcopacy, thus, was foisted on the American church by stages. Neither John Wesley nor the American preachers desired it. Its introduction was due solely to the ambitions of the two men who were at the head of the Methodist movement in America. The fact that the episcopal title was not assumed until connection with John Wesley was repudiated is of itself evidence that Wesley discountenanced the introduction of episcopacy into the American church. Full fledged episcopacy, thus, was brought into Methodism by the action of Coke and Asbury, independent of the American preachers, and independent of Wesley. The American preachers, from their high regard for their leaders, although not without some scruples, acquiesced to the arrangement. That they were averse to it even Dr. Coke himself acknowledges :

“ Our numerous societies in America would have been a regular Presbyterian Church if it had not been for myself, etc.”

Dr. Coke here takes to himself responsibility for fastening episcopacy upon American Methodism. He admits that the American societies were predisposed to a Presbyterian form of government, and takes to himself the merit—if merit it be—of bringing about a different result.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DID WESLEY INTEND TO RETAIN CONTROL OF AMERICAN METHODISM?

In the preceding chapters we have presented data to show that John Wesley did not intend to ordain Dr. Coke a bishop. Secondly, we gave an array of evidence to establish the fact that Dr. Coke was not faithful to Wesley's instructions in regard to the plan of government of the American societies. Thirdly, we tried to show that Wesley approved neither of the name nor of the substance of episcopacy for American Methodism.

On this last point we adduced testimony showing that Wesley disapproved the name Methodist Episcopal Church, and that he himself never recognized nor used it. We further showed by numerous quotations that Wesley held the unepiscopal theory that presbyters and bishops were identical, being but different names for the same order, thus taking away the very foundation stone of episcopacy; while on the other hand Asbury and Coke held to the prelatical view that a bishop was of a higher order than a presbyter. The fact that a different view of the episcopacy from that contemplated by Asbury and Coke originally has

since prevailed in the Methodist Episcopal Church is not to the point. The question is, Was John Wesley responsible for the episcopal system instituted by Asbury and Coke?

We pointed out, further, that Asbury and Coke were restrained from avowing their intentions to establish a thorough going episcopacy at the outset, but as soon as they felt sufficiently secure in their influence over the American preachers to dare to set at defiance Wesley's authority, they repudiated their accountability to him by striking his name off of the minutes. Furthermore, even without consultation with the preachers, they removed the word superintendent and substituted the word bishop, thus plainly avowing their purpose to institute an out-and-out episcopal system of government. It will be noticed that the assumption of complete episcopal pretensions occurred simultaneously with their repudiation of Wesley's authority. This bears witness to the fact that they knew of Wesley's intense opposition to their episcopal assumptions, and that they did not dare to take this step until they had cut loose from his authority. Thus the final assumption of full-fledged episcopal dignity was accompanied by defiance of Wesley's authority, and contemptuous disregard for the wishes of the American preachers; for, as Jesse Lee in his "History of the Methodists" observes:

"They changed the title themselves, without the consent of the conference; and then at the next conference they asked the preachers if the word bishop might not stand in the minutes, seeing it was a Scripture name, and the meaning of the word bishop was the same with that of superintendent. Some of the

preachers opposed the alteration, and wished to retain the former title, but a majority of the preachers agreed to let the word bishop remain."

Thus, by trampling upon Wesley's instructions, and by a usurpation of the authority that should have found expression alone in the deliberate choice of the American preachers themselves, they fastened upon American Methodism the episcopal system. They hoped to make permanent by this measure that power of supremacy to which their boundless ambitions prompted them.

We next turn to the consideration of a question already suggested by what we have presented, which is,

4. *Did John Wesley intend that American Methodism should become independent of his authority?*

If Wesley had deputed Dr. Coke as an agent to organize American Methodism on the basis of episcopacy, it would have followed that he should have expected the fatherly control that he had exercised over the societies in America to cease. An episcopacy essentially implies that the government of the church is absolutely in the hands of the *episcopoi* or bishops. To affirm that those who hold a governing position are accountable to another person; that their authority is delegated to them by this person, and may at any time be taken away by this same person, is to affirm that, however their position may be designated, they are not, at least, bishops. If, therefore, it is apparent that Wesley intended that Coke and

Asbury should still remain accountable to him, it follows that he did not intend to create them bishops in the episcopal sense.

We shall endeavor to show that Wesley had no thought whatever of releasing control of the American societies; that he regarded Coke and Asbury as simply his delegated representatives, to be directed as he chose, and recalled from their position at his pleasure. And if this point is established it becomes at once apparent that he did not appoint Coke and Asbury bishops, and did not contemplate an episcopacy in his "plan" for the government of American Methodists.

Whether it was wise or not for Wesley to endeavor to govern the American societies at long range is a question we do not raise. It does not touch the point at issue. The plan devised by Asbury and Coke may have been a wiser one. The simple question is, Was the episcopal plan of Coke and Asbury the product of Wesley's devising, as affirmed by Dr. Fry, of the *Central Christian Advocate*, by Dr. Buckley, and by the Methodist Episcopal Church Discipline? We confess that on the merits of the two plans we prefer that of government through the vote of the conference, as proposed by Asbury, to that of paternal control as proposed by Wesley. Undoubtedly the American societies had a right to break away from Wesley and institute any kind of ecclesiastical government they chose. But what we object to is the act of Asbury and Coke by which they instituted a form of government in direct violation of Wesley's instructions, and then, to get the endorsement of the American preachers to

this plan of their own, making the plea that it had been sent over to them by Wesley's authority. Asbury realized that the strongest influence that could be appealed to with the American preachers was their veneration for Wesley. He, to say the least, allowed them to remain under the impression that they were conforming to Wesley's desire in taking the course they did. And at the same time he was silently deploring Wesley's influence over them, as his own words will show, and laying plans by which he might free himself from it.

We now proceed to examine the evidence going to show that Wesley intended to retain full control of the American societies.

In the very first sentence of the letter Wesley gave to Coke certifying to the latter's appointment as superintendent, he expressed his intention that American Methodists should remain subject to his control. He said :

"Whereas many of the people in the southern provinces of North America who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, etc."

His letter starts out with the affirmation that the people to whom he sends Dr. Coke are those "who desire to continue under my care." He had no idea of relinquishing his authority over them. This letter clearly carried on the face of it Wesley's purpose in this respect. This letter was not made known by Dr. Coke to the American preachers, and came to light only after years had passed away. But nevertheless it clearly shows Wesley's determination to retain his

control of the American societies, and that he regarded Coke and Asbury as only emissaries to do his will.

Not only was this purpose expressed in Dr. Coke's letter of appointment, but a pledge was given by the Conference of 1784—whether at Wesley's prompting or not it is not clear—to faithfully obey Wesley in all matters of church government. Asbury says that they were compelled to give it. From what source the compulsory influence came he does not say, but in a letter to Joseph Benson he wrote:

“After the Revolution we were called upon to give a printed obligation, which here follows, and could not be dispensed with—it must be: ‘During the life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the gospel, ready in matters of church government to obey his commands; and we do engage after his death to do everything that we judge consistent with the cause of religion in America, and the political interests of the States, to preserve and promote our union with the Methodists in Europe.’”

Asbury consented to this subordinate relation to Wesley reluctantly. The veneration of the American preachers for Wesley was such that he did not then dare to suggest repudiation of the authority of the father of Methodism. He acquiesced because, as he says, it “could not be dispensed with—it must be.”

Wesley's understanding that American Methodists were to be subject to him was manifest in his continuing to exercise control over the superintendents. Two years after the Christmas conference of 1784 he appointed Mr. Whatcoat as an additional superintendent. In a letter to Dr. Coke making the appointment Wesley speaks as follows, showing that he regarded American Methodists as still under his control:



“ I desire that you would appoint a General Conference of our preachers in the United States to meet in Baltimore on May 1, 1787, and that Mr. Whatcoat may be appointed superintendent with Mr. Asbury.”

Asbury recognized clearly this intention of Wesley to hold his representatives in America accountable to himself, and complained of it. Asbury said in a letter to Benson :

“ He rigidly contended for a special and independent right of governing the chief minister or ministers of our order, which in our judgment meant not only to put him out of office, but to remove him from the continent to elsewhere that our father saw fit, and that notwithstanding our constitution, and the right of electing every church officer, and more especially our superintendent. We were told not till after the death of Mr. Wesley could our constitution have its full operations.”

Here Asbury clearly indicates that he was chafing under Wesley's control. He resented the supervision exercised by Wesley. Not only this, but his letter betrays the fact that he was conscious that the ecclesiastical structure he and Coke had created was out of accord with Wesley's desires, and so much so that “ not till after the death of Mr. Wesley could our constitution have its full operation.” Does that look as though Wesley had originated or approved of their work? If Wesley had suggested the episcopal system that Asbury and Coke planned, would they be likely to have to wait until the old man was out of the way to “ have its full operation ”?

Asbury was opposed to this subordination to Wesley from the start. As we said, he submitted simply because the attachment of the American preachers to Wesley was such that he dare not oppose it.

Asbury himself declares this. In a letter quoted by Emory, in his "Defence of the Fathers," Asbury says in regard to the pledge of allegiance to Wesley :

"I never approved that binding minute. I did not think it practical expediency to obey Wesley at three thousand miles distance in all matters relative to church government; neither did Bro. Whatcoat, nor several others. At the first General Conference I was mute and modest when it passed, and I was mute when it was expunged. For this Mr. Wesley blamed me, and was displeased that I did not rather reject the whole connection, or leave them if they did not comply."

Asbury never "approved that binding minute." He was "mute and modest when it passed." He did not think it "practical expediency to obey Wesley at three thousand miles distance." These expressions show very clearly what was Wesley's purpose and what was Asbury's attitude toward this purpose.

But two years or more passed away. In the meantime Asbury had become more firmly established in his influence over the American church. Things were brought to a crisis in 1787 by the expressed purpose of Wesley to remove Asbury from his office of superintendent and recall him to England. The time was ripe in Asbury's judgment for the repudiation of all allegiance to Wesley and the avowal of a full-fledged episcopacy that would give full scope to his ambition. He had carefully prepared the way for this step. At the very beginning in the conference of 1784 he had declined to receive the office of superintendent from Mr. Wesley, until he had first been elected to the place by the vote of the conference. He had tried to ward off the storm that would come from throwing off

Wesley's authority by skillfully pitting the authority of the conference against that of Wesley. Snethen in his "Reply to O'Kelly" says:

"Mr. Asbury refused to serve as a superintendent or bishop without the election of the conference."

This shows that he practically refused to acknowledge Wesley's authority at the outset. Again Snethen, in the *Mutual Rights* for June, 1828, speaking of the election of Asbury by the American preachers, says:

"I never heard it intimated that Mr. Wesley was the proposer of Mr. Asbury's election. All the circumstantial evidence convinces me that he was not, but that he was actually displeased with the measure. I will here relate what was my impression of Mr. Asbury's movements at the several of the General Conferences. It seemed to me that he laid his plans so as to call forth some expression from the General Conference which might seem tantamount to re-election."

Asbury himself declares that he had so far decided to free himself from Wesley's control as to determine not to receive the office of superintendent at his hands. In his journal Asbury says with reference to the mission of Coke to America:

"I was shocked when first informed of the intention of these my brethren in coming to this country. It may be of God. My answer then was, 'If the preachers unanimously choose me, I shall not act in the capacity I have hitherto done by Wesley's appointment.'"

In other words he proposed henceforth to receive no appointment from Wesley's authority. To free himself from Wesley he was willing to accept office at the hands of the American preachers. This seems like a laudable purpose to encourage home rule and

democratic government, but as we shall see before we get through, Asbury was not sincere in this, and was as ready to repudiate the authority of the conference, when it stood in the way of his autocratic ambitions, as he was that of Wesley.

Asbury thus had prepared the American conference for repudiating Wesley's control by appeal to the sentiment of home rule. In 1787 the appointment of Whatcoat brought things to a head. Emory in his "Defence of the Fathers" says:

"If they accept of Mr. Whatcoat by his authority in these circumstances, it might probably lead to Mr. Asbury's recall."

So it was proposed to expunge the pledge of allegiance to Wesley from the minutes and drop Wesley's name from the official record of American Methodism. Asbury himself says he was "mute when it was expunged." But facts go to show that he was more than a passive observer. Some of those best acquainted with him gave him credit for the work of severing the American church from Wesley. James O'Kelly publicly put the responsibility of striking Wesley's name off of the minutes upon Asbury. In his "Apology" he says:

"After these things Francis took with him a few chosen men, and in a clandestine manner expelled John, whose surname was Wesley from the Methodist Episcopal Church."

Rankin, who from his long and close association with Asbury in America, knew him perfectly, exclaimed as soon as the news reached England that the Americans had renounced Wesley's authority,

"That's Frank Asbury's doings."

It is but due to Coke to say that he was reluctant

to take this step. While he must have shared with Asbury in the first action, by which the American preachers were kept in ignorance of Wesley's real designs, he drew back when it came to this final step of throwing off entirely Wesley's authority. Coke was ambitious and vain, but he recoiled from repudiating his fealty to the man through whom he had received such marked favor.

If there could have been any doubt as to Wesley's purpose to keep control of the American societies before the conference of 1787 dropped his name from the minutes, there could have been none after the news of this action reached him. He was grieved beyond expression. It is even said that it hastened his death. He expressed his dissatisfaction in strong terms. In the "Life of Whatcoat," by Phœbus, is found this letter, written by Wesley to Whatcoat, in 1787:

"It was not well judged by Bro. Asbury to *suffer*, much less indirectly encourage, the foolish step in the last conference. Every preacher present ought, both in duty and in prudence, to have said, 'Bro. Asbury, Mr. Wesley is your father, consequently ours.' Candor will affirm this in the face of the world. It is highly probable that disallowing me will, as soon as my head is laid, occasion a total breach between the English and American Methodists. They will naturally say, 'If they can do without us, we can do without them.' But they would find a greater difference than they imagine. Next would follow a separation among themselves."

Again, in a letter dated October 31, 1789, published by Hammett, in Charlestown, Wesley said:

"I was a little surprised when I received some letters from Mr. Asbury affirming that no person in Europe knew how to direct

those in America. Soon after he flatly refused to receive Mr. Whatcoat in the character I sent him. He told George Shadford, ' Mr. Wesley and I are like Cæsar and Pompey ; he will bear no equal and I will bear no superior.' And accordingly he sat by until his friends voted my name out of the American minutes. This completed the matter and showed that he had no connection with me."

These letters clearly reflect Wesley's displeasure at the course taken by the American church, and show that he attributed their action to Asbury's ambition.

Not only was Wesley displeased. Notwithstanding Asbury counted on the ascendancy of his personal influence, and the natural desire of Americans for ecclesiastical home rule, there was much dissatisfaction at the harsh treatment of Wesley. Phœbus in his "Memoirs of Whatcoat," testifies to the discontent among the American preachers at this renunciation of Wesley's authority :

" This was a time of trial with many who laid it to heart. It was to be feared that part would continue a society, or form again under Mr. Wesley, independent of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Many felt like being scattered when the shepherd had received so heavy a blow from his friends."

We have, we think, clearly established the fact that Wesley had no thought of relinquishing his control of the American societies when he made Coke and Asbury superintendents, and therefore that he did not intend to institute an episcopacy.

## CHAPTER V.

### DID WESLEY INTEND TO ORGANIZE AN INDEPENDENT CHURCH IN AMERICA?

In our endeavor to show that Wesley was not responsible for the introduction of episcopacy into American Methodism, we have attempted to present documentary evidence to establish four points : First, that Wesley did not appoint Dr. Coke a bishop ; secondly, that Dr. Coke was not faithful to Wesley's instructions ; thirdly, that Wesley approved of episcopacy neither in name nor in substance ; fourthly, that Wesley did not intend that American Methodism should become independent of his authority.

In developing the last point we showed how, if Wesley had designed an episcopacy, he would have relinquished his paternal control of the American societies. That he did not do this was made apparent from the very documents defining Coke's commission, which documents, however, Coke failed to lay fully before the American preachers. Wesley's acts and letters subsequently also show clearly his design to maintain the same control over the American societies he had previously done. We noted further, how Asbury chafed under this subordinate relation to Wes-

ley, and how, just as soon as he could do so successfully, he threw off the yoke of allegiance to Wesley. We observed that Wesley was greatly grieved by the course taken under Asbury's influence, and also that there was great dissatisfaction among some of the American preachers at this treatment of Wesley.

Akin to cutting loose from Wesley's authority, was the action of Asbury and Coke by which they established an independent American Methodist Episcopal Church. It becomes important to know Wesley's attitude to this phase of the course taken by Asbury and Coke, and therefore we ask,

5. *Did Wesley intend to organize an independent church in America?*

It is apparent that if Wesley proposed to introduce a system of episcopacy into American Methodism, he must have contemplated the severance of all relations with the Church of England, and the organization of an independent, separate church. If it can be shown, therefore, that Wesley had no thought of separating the American societies from the Established Church, it follows as a matter of course that he did not intend to establish an independent episcopal church government for the Methodists of America.

Wesley's purpose in this regard is very clear. Over and over again has he declared that he never intended that the Methodists, either in England or America, should separate from the Church of England. In writing of what he had done for Methodists in America, August 30, 1785, eight months after the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church he said :



“I appointed three of our laborers to go and help them, by not only preaching the word of God, but likewise by administering the Lord’s supper and baptizing their children throughout that vast tract of land. These are steps which, not of choice but necessity, I have slowly and deliberately taken. If any one is pleased to call this separating from the church, he may. But the law of England does not call it so.”

The above conclusively shows that in the arrangements made for American Methodism Wesley had no thought of separation from the Church of England, but that his sole object was to provide for the administration of the sacraments to the American Methodists. It also shows that he was not at that time aware of the fact that Asbury and Coke had effected complete separation by the establishment of an independent church.

Wesley ordained several ministers for the Methodists in Scotland, many of whom were leaving the societies because they were not supplied with ministers authorized to administer the sacraments. He explains that the purpose actuating him in this case was the same that moved him to ordain ministers for America. He says:

“To prevent this I at length consented to take the same step with regard to Scotland which I had done with regard to America. But this is not separation from the church at all. Whatever then is done, either in America or Scotland, is no separation from the Church of England. I have no thought of this. I have many objections against it.”—*Wesley’s Works*, Vol. VII, p. 314.

In a letter to Charles Wesley, August 19, 1785, Wesley said respecting separation from the Church of England:

“ I no more separate from it now than I did in 1758.”

In a letter dated September 20, 1788, nearly four years after the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Wesley thus declared himself in regard to separation :

“ Such a separation I have always declared against, and certainly it will not take place, if it ever does, while I live.”

How could he more emphatically express himself upon his purpose in this respect than he did when he penned the following declaration :

“ I never had any design of separating from the church ; I have no such design now. I do not believe Methodists in general design it when I am no more seen. I do, and will do, all that is in my power to prevent such an event.” “ None who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it.”

Nor was he satisfied with simply declaring that this was his own personal desire. He insisted that it must be the accepted purpose of all who were associated with him. Speaking of Methodists generally he affirmed of them in regard to separation the following sentiment :

“ In spite of all manner of temptations they will not separate from the church. What many so earnestly covet, they abhor ; they will not be a distinct body.”

These declarations so often repeated in such clear and explicit terms leave no ambiguity as to Wesley's intention in this regard. They carry conviction with them. Candid authorities in the Methodist Episcopal Church admit that it was no part of Wesley's plan to form a distinct church. Dr. Atkinson, author of the “ Centennial History of American Methodism,” in speaking of the idea that the foundation of an independent church was a part of Wesley's plan, says :

“How Wesley could have formed such a plan, in view of his declaration that what he did with respect to America was no separation from the Church of England; that he had no thought of such a separation; and the further fact that he intended still to exercise control over the American Methodists, is not apparent.”—*Centennial History of American Methodism*, page 68.

The same author in examining Wesley's letter explaining his reasons for sending Dr. Coke to America, says:

“Here Mr. Wesley seems to set forth that his intention in sending Dr. Coke to America was not to separate the societies from the Church of England, but to give them sacraments. For this purpose he ordained Whatcoat and Vasey and sent them with Coke.—”*Centennial History of American Methodism*, p. 54.

But, it might be said, May not Dr. Coke have been ignorant of, or confused in regard to, this clearly designed purpose of Wesley in respect to American Methodism? For Dr. Coke's sake and Asbury's sake it would be desirable that such a construction might be placed upon the matter. But facts will not allow it. The documents, that Dr. Coke carried in his pocket, clearly set forth that Wesley intended that American Methodism should not become an independent church. These documents, and such portions of them as indicated Wesley's purpose in this respect, did not come before the American preachers. They were suppressed or destroyed.

In the letter of September 10, 1784, addressed to Coke, Asbury, and the brethren in North America, there was a paragraph which clearly indicated Wesley's purpose that the American societies should continue in their relation to the Church of England. It reads :

“ And I have prepared a liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England (I think the best constituted national church in the world), which I advise all the traveling preachers to use on the Lord’s day, in all the congregations, reading the litany on Wenesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days.”

This paragraph does not appear in the copy of Wesley’s letter as published in the minutes of the American conference, but it does appear in the copy of the letter published in Wesley’s works and in the British minutes. The absence of this paragraph from the American copy of the letter, when taken in connection with the purpose to establish an independent church, can easily be accounted for.

The letter certifying to Dr. Coke’s appointment as superintendent, which we have already referred to, shows not only that Wesley intended that American Methodists should remain under his control, but that they should retain their connection with the Church of England. He says :

“ Whereas many people in the southern provinces of North America, who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, etc.”

This letter explicitly states that it is addressed to those people who expect still to “adhere to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England.” This implies, of course, that they were to remain under the same relations to the government of the Church of England which they had sustained before, and which generally characterized the Methodist societies during Wesley’s life.

This letter was not presented to the conference of American preachers. Had it been known to them

they could not well have been led to believe that it was Wesley's purpose to establish an independent church. McCaine, who thoroughly examined every accessible source of information in regard to the circumstances accompanying the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, says of Dr. Coke's disposal of this letter :

“ He suppressed the letter given him by Wesley as the testimonial of the office he was to fill, and the work he was to do. This letter he never suffered to see the light, nor did it until after his death, when it was published by his executor, Mr. Drew.”—*Letters on Methodist Episcopacy.*

What the “little sketch” which Wesley said he had prepared, may have contained on the subject of maintaining connection with the Church of England has never transpired, as no part of the contents of such a document as that indicated has become known.

Now with these clearly expressed declarations of Wesley's purpose there was no chance for Dr. Coke to be in the dark as to Wesley's objection to the establishment of an independent church. And the disposition of the documents shows that he was not in the dark.

To what extent Asbury shared in this deliberate subversion of Wesley's designs is hard to tell. Circumstances, however, strongly go to show that he had as much to do with it as Dr. Coke.

Very soon after reaching America, Dr. Coke had a private conference with Asbury prior to laying the subject before the American preachers. Dr. Coke's account of this interview, as published in the *Arminian Magazine* for 1789, page 243, is as follows :

“After dining in company with eleven of the preachers at our Sister Barratt’s, about a mile from the chapel, I privately opened our plan to Mr. Asbury. *He expressed considerable doubts concerning it, which I rather applauded than otherwise.*”

This is a very significant paragraph. It shows that there were exceptions taken to Wesley’s plan. Dr. Coke puts on Asbury the responsibility of leading off in the departure from Wesley’s plan, but at the same time indicates that he approves of the changes suggested by Asbury. It shows that they were agreed on a course different from that outlined by Wesley, and there can be no doubt but that the establishment of an independent church was one of the points of departure. There can be but little doubt that then and there they agreed upon a plan differing from that of Wesley in that it proposed the organization of an independent church and the introduction of episcopacy.

In Coke’s Journal, afterward published, we find the same account, but with the sentence we have italicized missing. It would seem as though this sentence threw more light on the way Dr. Coke and Asbury changed Wesley’s plans to their liking than Dr. Coke intended, and therefore on reflection was omitted. As time went on the importance of having it understood that Wesley sanctioned all these steps became greater, and so there was a motive for covering up any unguarded expressions which might arouse the suspicion that Wesley had not suggested their course.

The plan as agreed upon by Asbury and Coke was then laid before some of the preachers, as affirmed by Asbury, who says:

“The design of organizing the Methodists into an inde-

pendent episcopal church was opened to the preachers present and it was agreed to call a General Conference to meet at Baltimore the ensuing Christmas."

At the subsequent Christmas Conference the American preachers enthusiastically received this plan of creating an independent church, believing it was the plan prepared for them by Wesley. It was no doubt in accord with the general desire of the American preachers, who were not very strongly in sympathy with the Protestant Episcopal Church. And no doubt organization on the basis of separation from the Church of England could easily be justified. The fault consisted in making it appear as the wish of Wesley in order to serve as a cloak for smuggling in episcopacy.

That the American preachers accepted this as the plan prepared for them by Wesley, is stated by Ezekiel Cooper, one of the members of the Christmas Conference of 1784. He says in his "Sermon on Asbury":

"From that time the Methodist societies in the United States of America became an independent church, under the episcopal mode and form of government, designing, professing and resolving to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church, according to the advice of Mr. Wesley, and in perfect unison with the views, the opinions and wishes of Mr. Asbury."

Asbury at this conference was elected and ordained superintendent with Dr. Coke. In the ordination sermon of Asbury, Dr. Coke took occasion to set forth the idea that Wesley designed to form the American Methodist societies into an independent church, and at the same time he had the documents in his

pocket, in Wesley's own handwriting, that contradicted the statement he made from the pulpit. Dr. Coke said :

“ Mr. Wesley, after long deliberation, saw it his duty to form his society in America into an independent church. But he loved the most excellent liturgy of the Church of England ; he loved its rites and ceremonies, and, therefore, adopted them in most instances for the present case.”

Not satisfied with this deliberate misrepresentation of Wesley's purposes, Dr. Coke thought it necessary to give a reason why Wesley had come to the conclusion that separation from the Church of England was the proper thing for the American societies. Continuing, he said :

“ Why, then, did you not separate before ? It has long been the desire of the preachers and the people. But they submitted to the superior judgment of Mr. Wesley, who, till the Revolution, doubted the propriety of the step.”

This was what Dr. Coke said when the heat of his ambition to be at the head of an episcopal church smothered his conscience and his judgment. Several years later, when Asbury's ascendancy in power had obscured and humiliated Dr. Coke, and his influence over the American church was gone, Dr. Coke wrote a letter to Bishop White, of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America, in which he admitted that he had been unfaithful to the trust committed to him by Wesley. This letter was written to Bishop White with the intention of trying to partly undo the wrong he had done Wesley by paving the way for the reunion of American Methodists with the Protestant Episcopal Church. In this letter Dr. Coke says :

“ I am not sure but that I went farther in the separation of



church in America than Mr. Wesley, from whom I received my commission, did intend. He did, indeed, solemnly, invest me, so far as he had a right so to do, with episcopal authority, but did not intend, I think, that our entire separation should take place. This I am certain of, that he (Wesley) is now sorry for the separation."

Here, then, is the humiliating confession that after all the plan on which the Methodist Episcopal Church had been organized was not Wesley's plan. Episcopacy had been foisted upon the American church on the strength of the plea that it was Wesley's desire; and the reverence in which Wesley was held led the liberty loving Americans to submit to this baseless declaration. But Dr. Coke here admits that this plea of which so much had been made was without foundation.

We have now shown that the claim that Wesley recommended the organization of an independent church is without foundation. It follows, therefore, that the claim that he was the author of episcopacy in American Methodism also falls to the ground, as an episcopal church government in American Methodism made necessary an entire separation from the Church of England.

## CHAPTER VI.

### AMBITION, NOT WESLEY, THE PARENT OF EPISCOPACY IN METHODISM.

We have considered five points so far. We have tried to show, first, that Wesley did not intend to make a bishop of Dr. Coke ; secondly, that Dr. Coke did not carry out Wesley's instructions ; thirdly, that Wesley did not approve either of the use of episcopal nomenclature, or of the essential principle on which episcopacy is founded ; fourthly, that Wesley intended that American Methodism should remain under his authority ; fifthly, that he did not intend to organize an independent church in America.

Each of these propositions we have fortified with abundant and conclusive documentary evidence. Taken together they form a mass of facts irreconcilable with, and utterly contradictory to, the theory that Wesley was the father of the system of episcopacy fastened upon the Methodist Episcopal Church by Asbury and Coke.

We have shown how Asbury and Coke led the American preachers to believe that the episcopal plan which they themselves devised was really the plan recommended for American Methodists by Wesley.

Had the essential features of this plan been known to have been of their own origination, and especially had it been known that they were in diametrical opposition to Wesley's wishes, it could not be dreamed for a moment that the American liberty-loving preachers would have submitted to so autocratic a system. They were cruelly misled, and through their veneration for Wesley and their respect for their leaders they became parties to a transaction which otherwise could not but have received their disapprobation.

But why were not Coke and Asbury disposed to carry out the instructions received from Wesley? Why did they wish to introduce the system of episcopacy when they knew that it was contrary to Wesley's wish, and involved cutting loose from his control, and entire separation from the Church of England? Why were they willing, not only to allow the Methodist preachers to remain under the impression that this was Wesley's plan, but to help to create that impression and to use it for the advancement of their ends? Nothing short of a powerful motive can explain the course pursued by them, and it shall be the purpose of this chapter to see if we can discover in the acknowledged character of these men that which will supply such a motive.

The topic we shall discuss in the present chapter, therefore, is,

6. *Do the known characters of Asbury and Coke supply a motive that explains the introduction of episcopacy into American Methodism, and the consequent frustration of Wesley's plan?*

It is clearly demonstrated that Wesley intended that Coke and Asbury should act simply as his agents.

He did not intend to invest them with any powers he could not withdraw at his own pleasure. They were to remain subject to his direction just as they had been when in England. He had no thought of conferring a life-tenure, such as the episcopate essentially is, upon them. He had no thought of their exercising a power over which he should not have an effective veto. His whole course before and after their appointment as superintendents is evidence of this. Indeed, Wesley, several years subsequent to the organization of the Methodist church, clearly expressed his intention of calling Asbury back to England. Nicholas Snethen gives his testimony on this point. He says :

“ We know to a certainty that Mr. Wesley never meant to confer any power for life, upon the superintendents, which he and Dr. Coke ordained ; for he actually had it in contemplation to recall Mr. Asbury. Of such an event Mr. Asbury was so well aware that he took special care to prevent it, by getting himself elected superintendent by the American preachers.”

This relation of dependency upon Wesley was one to which Asbury especially was averse. He chafed under it. His love of power, as we shall try to show, was one of the consuming elements of his character. He submitted to Wesley only so far as it was a necessity to maintain his control over the American church.

With Coke the love of preferment had an equal influence. He was a vain man. He strove for distinction and applause. Vanity was his greatest weakness.

The episcopal plan, as they devised it, ministered

to these weaknesses in the two men. How far they may have deluded themselves with the idea that they were justified in their course we have no means of knowing. But that ambition and vanity supplied the motive that led them to take the course they did is, we think, made apparent, both by the attendant circumstances, and by the acknowledged character of the men.

There can be no doubt in regard to the zeal of both men in their work of propagating vital religion. They were both earnest in doing good, but along with their earnestness and zeal there was that love of power that is so frequently seen even in the best of men. With Asbury there seems to be some excuse for his desire to control American Methodism without foreign intervention. As Wesley had been instrumental in raising up English Methodism, so Asbury was the agency through which, chiefly, Methodism in America came into existence. No doubt Asbury felt that he held much the same relation to American Methodism that Wesley did to Methodism in England. He was no doubt sincere, and perhaps right, in his belief that he was better qualified to govern American Methodism than Wesley, three thousand miles away. This conviction, joined to the overmastering ambition with which nature had endowed him, explains much of the course that he pursued.

Dr. Coke did not have the claim on American Methodism that Asbury had. Vanity and ambition alone can account for his deliberate subversion of Wesley's plans, and the deception by which he made it appear to the American preachers that the episco-

pacy, of which he and Asbury alone were the authors, was the wish of Wesley. That this trait of character was the ruling principle of his life we have abundant evidence. It was not only manifest in his relation to American Methodism, but in all the leading events of his life. We have abundant testimony on this point. Wesley himself saw this element in his character from the start. In a letter to Walter Churchey, of June 25, 1777, soon after Dr. Coke had entered the Methodist movement, Wesley says :

“ Dr. Coke promises fair, and gives us reason to hope that he will bring forth not only blossoms but fruit. He has hitherto behaved exceedingly well, and seems to be aware of his grand enemy, applause. He will likewise be in danger from offense.”  
—*Wesley's Works, Vol. VI., page 61.*

Wesley saw that vanity was his “grand enemy,” thus early after his conversion to Methodism. Rev. Henry Moore, in his life of Wesley, says of Dr. Coke's character in this respect :

“ He was, as his biographer acknowledges, naturally ambitious and inspiring ; and for some years had made great efforts to obtain preferment in the church.”

The American preachers were not slow in finding out this weakness. He had not the almost infinite tact of Asbury. As a result he soon became unpopular, and was much complained of for his overbearing, arrogant treatment of the preachers. Rev. John Kobler in speaking of Jesse Lee's opposition to Dr. Coke, has said :

“ He could not endure the absolute spirit and overbearing disposition of Dr. Coke as a high officer in the church. Mr. Lee was a candid man, and in no wise disposed to give flattering titles to any, and as such he opposed the offer with great zeal and eloquence.”

Not only was Coke's own arrogance and vanity in his way, but it was apparent that Asbury could not endure to have a rival in power and authority. Through these causes the influence of Coke waned, leaving Asbury the undisputed dictator of American Methodism. So great became Dr. Coke's eclipse, that at last he was compelled to surrender his episcopal claim, in its most important function of appointing the preachers. This he did by signing the following agreement to abdicate this privilege:

"I do solemnly engage by this instrument that I never will, by virtue of my office as superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church, exercise any government whatever in said Methodist Episcopal Church during my absence from the United States. And I do also engage that I will exercise no privilege in the said church when present in the United States, except that of ordaining according to the regulations and laws already existing or hereafter to be made in said church, and that of presiding when present in conference, and lastly, that of travelling at large.

THOMAS COKE."

Notwithstanding Coke had sacrificed his fidelity to Mr. Wesley in order to gratify his ambition, he was at last driven to the humiliating extremity of being shorn of his hard-earned episcopal dignities, and compelled to leave America in disgrace.

Asbury was a much stronger man than Dr. Coke. His course was much more consistent throughout. Nevertheless he also was a man who was swayed by a powerful ambition. He could brook no rival, and would submit to no superior. As Asbury said to George Shadford:

"Mr. Wesley and I are like Cæsar and Pompey; he will bear no equal, and I will bear no superior."

He resented all attempt to divide his authority with others. Rankin went back to England unable to work with Asbury. Rankin regarded him as arbitrary and tyrannical. Dr. Bangs in his history notices this lack of harmony between Rankin and Asbury, but leans evidently to Asbury's explanation of it. He says :

"To a difference of judgment between them Mr. Asbury alludes in several places, by which it appears that, in his opinion, Mr. Rankin assumed too much power over the preachers and people."

Dr. Coke was no more successful in getting along with Asbury, and succumbed to Asbury's power and his own weakness. Whatcoat was appointed by Wesley as joint superintendent, but, as Wesley himself says, Asbury "flatly refused to receive him." O'Kelly, who knew Asbury's spirit thoroughly, has said of him :

"Francis was opposed to a joint superintendent."

McKendree, before he became bishop, took offense at the way Asbury used his power and for a time left the church on that account. He said of Asbury's course in regard to himself :

"It is an insult to my understanding, and such an arbitrary stretch of power, so tyrannical that I cannot submit to it."

Ezekiel Cooper was one of the most prominent of the early Methodist preachers, and a warm friend of Asbury. Still he saw this element in Asbury's character. He said of Asbury :

"He was too fond of power, and too tenacious of maintaining his authority. I have no difficulty in admitting honestly and candidly that the objections, when considered on general principles, are too well founded."—*Cooper on Asbury, page 124.*



Wesley's letter to Asbury rebuking him for his assumption of episcopal authority is incontrovertible evidence of the overpowering strength of Asbury's lust for greatness. How withering are Wesley's words :

"But in one point, my dear brother, I am a little afraid both the doctor (Dr. Coke) and you differ from me. I study to be little; you study to be great. I creep; you strut along. I found a school, you a college! Nay, and call it after your own names. O beware! Do not seek to be something! Let me be nothing and Christ all in all. One instance of this, your greatness has given me great concern. How can you, how dare you, suffer yourself to be called a bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought. Men may call me a knave or a fool, a rascal, and I am content; but they shall never, by my consent, call me a bishop. For my sake, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, put a full end to this."

Nicholas Snethen was always a warm admirer of Asbury, while yet not approving his arbitrary methods. He says that Asbury was a man of "iron will." His intimate association with Asbury led him to know the man thoroughly. Snethen, in his funeral oration on Asbury, thus analyzes some of the overmastering traits of Asbury's character:

"Ambition of governing and suspicion of disposition may attach to his memory. Of all the missionaries which Mr. Wesley sent to this country, might we not admit without reproach to his memory that the young Francis Asbury may have been the most ambitious? Has it not enabled him to labor more abundantly than his fellow-missionaries? In regard to the charge that he was of a suspicious disposition, it might properly have been inferred from his well-known irritability, his faculty for obtaining the most secret information, and the quickness and penetration of his genius."

One of the most marked instances of Asbury's

tendency to the assumption of dictatorial power was manifest in his effort to free himself from the control of the General Conference. He himself had created the General Conference in order to make use of it in throwing off subordination to Wesley. Snethen makes an observation in regard to this device of Asbury's to free himself from Wesley, and his subsequent effort to again free himself from the General Conference. Snethen says :

“ And it is due to Mr. Asbury to acknowledge that though he was the first to offend, and thus procured his own election, he did all he could to render the practice null and void. The council-plan will forever remain a proof of this.”

Asbury desired to receive his position as superintendent from the election of American preachers, rather than from Wesley, that he might owe no allegiance to Wesley. The conference, therefore, was devised for this purpose, and Asbury would not accept office until it came from their hands. Snethen says :

“ The circumstantial evidence is sufficiently strong to induce a belief that Mr. Asbury had an eye to his own security in making his election a previous condition of his ordination.”

But having freed himself from Wesley, Asbury had no idea of fostering a democratic principle in the government of American Methodism. His next thought was how to get rid of the power he had thus called into existence. He devised a plan, therefore, which contemplated the abolishment of the General Conference and the substitution of a council consisting of a few presiding elders of his own appointment. He was to have a veto power over this council, and as they were creatures of his own appointment, it left him autocrat of the situation.

Such a council was organized, and met for the first time on December 1, 1789. This council had "power to mature and resolve all things relative to the spiritual and temporal interests of the church." But this movement to usurp absolute authority awakened at last the resistance of American preachers. They protested against this tyrannical measure, and under the leadership of O'Kelly succeeded in reinstating the General Conference in position. Jesse Lee in his "History of Methodism" says:

"Their proceedings gave such dissatisfaction to our connection in general and to our travelling preachers in particular, that they were forced to abandon the plan, and there has never since been a meeting of the kind."

Coke, who was still in America, but who was shorn of his power, strange to say, turned republican, and joined with O'Kelly in an attempt to put a check upon the episcopal assumption of absolute authority. Dr. Atkinson in his "Centennial History of Methodism" says of this "event":

"Bishop Asbury appears to have been opposed to a General Conference, while Mr. O'Kelly was thoroughly in favor of it. The latter labored zealously and successfully to accomplish his design. He wrote letters to Dr. Coke, and secured his co-operation. As a result, Asbury and Coke were brought to the verge of antagonism."

As a result of this controversy, there threatened to be a division of the church. To prevent this Asbury at last consented that the General Conference should still continue to exist. Snethen explains Asbury's submission by his fear of division. He says in his "Reply to O'Kelly":

“ Mr. Asbury submitted to General Conference for fear of a division in the connection.”

The council plan thus failed. But Asbury's power still remained absolute so far as control of the appointment of preachers was concerned. Asbury had no democratic tendencies. He did not scruple to take the power out of the hands of both preacher and people so far as opportunity offered. He found willing partners among the preachers in making the legislative body an assemblage in which the people had no representation. Snethen again says:

“ Mr. Asbury, though he had failed in his council project, found no serious scruples among the preachers in taking all the law making power from the people.”

We have pursued this phase of the subject far enough to accomplish our present purpose, which is to show that the deep-seated ambition of Coke and the autocratic disposition of Asbury supply motives strong enough to explain the course they pursued in introducing episcopacy into American Methodism, in defiance of Wesley's instructions.

We think we have now presented a mass of insurmountable evidence that Wesley was not the author of episcopacy in American Methodism. The arguments that have been adduced to support the view that he did originate the episcopal system embodied in the Methodist Episcopal Church are few and meagre. We shall devote the next chapter to a consideration of them.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE WESLEYAN ORIGIN OF EPISCOPACY EXAMINED.

In our previous chapters we have presented evidence going to show that Wesley was not the originator of episcopacy in American Methodism. We have substantiated each point by abundant and, as it seems to us, irrefutable documentary testimony. We have shown that Wesley had a deep seated aversion to episcopal terms and episcopal assumptions, and that he was diametrically opposed to the distinction in orders, which is the fundamental basis of a true episcopal system. We have pointed out that all the circumstances attending the embassy of Dr. Coke indicate that Wesley had no thought of making him a bishop, and that he intended only to make a provision for the government of the American societies through his representative, and for the administration of the sacraments. We have established the fact by abundant testimony that Coke and Asbury deviated from the instructions of Wesley, consciously and purposely. We have designated several features in these departures from Wesley's instructions, and have shown the plan Wesley had in mind could not have been made to harmonize with the deviations that episcopacy made necessary.

In the last chapter we concluded the array of evidence by showing that the known ambitious character of the two men supplied a motive strong enough to account for the course which they pursued. We adduced the statements of many of the most intimate friends of each of the men, going to show that ambition of power and preferment formed the controlling dispositions in each case.

We think, therefore, that the affirmation that Wesley was not the originator of episcopacy in American Methodism is clearly sustained by the facts presented, and, furthermore, that it did not meet his approbation. Wesley's own declarations, the attendant circumstances, and the testimony of others all go to show this.

Furthermore, this view is confirmed by utterances of Coke and Asbury, who have, at times, unthinkingly perhaps, given expression to statements that show that they regarded themselves, and not Wesley, as the real originators of the episcopal system. These utterances would not have much weight, perhaps, were they disconnected with the numerous facts that go to show that they are unreflecting declarations of the truth. They might easily be explained if there were nothing further to sustain them. But in the light of the facts we have given they show that Coke and Asbury actually regarded themselves as the authors of the episcopal system, and that they did not seek to place this responsibility upon Wesley when they were unconstrained in their utterances.

Dr. Coke on several occasions acknowledged himself as the author of the episcopal features in American Methodism.

In a letter to his American brethren in 1807 Dr. Coke said :

“ I had been the means of establishing your present form of church government, which in a general view, though it may admit improvements, I prefer to any other.”

In his letter to Bishop White, in which he proposed the return of the American Methodists to the Protestant Episcopal Church, Dr. Coke took upon himself the responsibility of fastening episcopacy upon Methodism. He says :

“ Our numerous societies would have been a regular Presbyterian Church were it not for me.”

These and similar utterances show that Dr. Coke regarded himself in large measure, if not wholly, responsible for the episcopal feature in the church.

Asbury refused from the beginning to acknowledge Wesley as the source of episcopal authority. He refused to accept the office of superintendent as coming from Wesley, and would receive it only at the hands of the American preachers. How far he was more than a passive spectator in creating the tradition that the episcopacy was Wesley's plan we can not tell. But certainly in his expressed declarations Asbury seems to be consistent in that he does not lay the responsibility of episcopacy upon Wesley. In enumerating the sources of his authority as a Methodist bishop he does not mention Wesley at all. These are the sources to which he refers his episcopal authority:

“1st, Divine authority; 2d, Seniority in America; 3d, Election of the General Conference 1784; 4th, Ordination of

Coke, Otterbein, Whatcoat and Vasey ; 5th, Because the signs of an apostle were found in me."—*Journal, May, 1805, Vol. III, p. 168.*

Asbury himself was, no doubt, the chief formative influence in giving shape to the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church. No one was more conversant with Asbury's character and the part he had in the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church than Nicholas Snethen, and Snethen ascribed the shaping of the church to Asbury. He says :

" I assume it as a fact that Francis Asbury was the father of the present system which goes under the name of the form of discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church ; without his agency and influence it never would have been what it is now."

Snethen also recognized the fact that the course pursued by Asbury and Coke made it impossible to regard Wesley as responsible for what they did. He says :

" The truth is that the intention of Mr. Wesley was countervailed by the election of the Methodist bishops."

We pass now to consider the arguments advanced to show that episcopacy, as introduced in the Methodist Episcopal Church, originated with Wesley.

No direct evidence has ever been brought forward to show that Wesley either devised the system that Coke and Asbury instituted, or that he approved it after it was created. Not a line from the pen of Wesley can be produced in which he approved of the organization of American Methodism into an episcopal church. It is true that the opening section of the Methodist Episcopal Discipline attributes episcopacy to Wesley, but not a



word from Wesley directly endorsing the work of Coke and Asbury has ever been produced to sustain the statements there made.

When McCaine was preparing his work entitled "History and Mystery of Methodist Episcopacy," he addressed a letter to each of the bishops then living asking if any of them had ever seen anything from Wesley to sustain the statement made in this discipline. Failing to get any light he then wrote letters to six of the oldest Methodist preachers who had been members of the conference of 1784, and they testified that they had never seen anything from Wesley directly on the subject. This together with other known facts led McCaine to say :

"There exists not in the range of our research any paper, letter or document to prove that Mr. Wesley ever intended to constitute Dr. Coke or Mr. Asbury as a bishop ; or that he ever recommended or gave counsel that the societies should adopt the episcopal mode of church government in preference to any other."

No document has ever yet been produced in which Wesley has recommended for the American societies the episcopal polity which Asbury and Coke instituted, or in which he approved of it after it was adopted.

The so-called arguments in favor of attributing episcopacy to Wesley, so far as we have seen them, may be reduced to four heads :

First, it is said that Wesley never publicly disavowed a purpose to introduce episcopacy into American Methodism. If that claim were true, it would amount to nothing. To try to prove that a man entertains a particular purpose because he has never speci-

fically declared he did not entertain it, is a very feeble kind of argument, resorted to only when nothing else is left. But this argument, weak as it is, is not strictly true. As we have shown in preceding articles, Wesley did express disapprobation of the work of Coke and Asbury at points that arrayed him essentially against the episcopal system. The letter of rebuke to Asbury for allowing himself to be called bishop is but one of these utterances. These expressions of disapproval may have been much more numerous and forcible than the world knows of. Such expressions from Wesley as have come to light have transpired only after years. Wesley's disposition was such that he did not bring complaints to the world of wrongs that were done him. He carried his complaints directly to the parties concerned. Had Wesley expressed himself ever so strongly to Asbury and Coke against the organization of an episcopal church in America, they would have been the last persons to allow these utterances to become known. Even Wesley's famous letter rebuking Asbury was unknown until Moore, his biographer, brought it to light. Wesley, no doubt, was disposed to make the best of an irremediably bad piece of work. He did not parade his grief and disappointment to the world. Yet even Coke himself admits that he was stricken at heart by the course that had been taken in America, and that his life was thereby shortened.

A second argument is that Wesley established an episcopacy *in fact* when he appointed Coke and Asbury superintendents of the American societies. This is a subterfuge. It implies that the office to which

Wesley assigned Coke and Asbury was identical in character and in authority with the episcopal office of bishop, and that Wesley's sole objection was to the use of the term bishop. We have previously shown at length how fallacious is this view. We have shown how Wesley never intended that they should pass out from under his authority, nor that they should be exalted to an office for life, nor that Methodists should be separated from the Church of England, all of which are essentially involved in the system of episcopacy. It was not an episcopacy *in fact* any more than in name which Wesley planned. To affirm this is simply to juggle with words.

While we say this, we do not wish it to be understood that we hold that Wesley intended to institute a democratic ecclesiastical polity in the American societies. This is not our contention. We do not claim Wesley as an ecclesiastical republican. It is very evident that he intended during his life to exercise a paternal government over all the Methodist societies, both in the old world and in the new. By the institution of the episcopal system, and the organization of an independent church in America, Asbury and Coke stole a march upon Wesley. What we contend for is that it is both false in fact and unjust to Wesley to father upon him the device which was invented and used in order to defeat the plans he had in view.

Had Wesley's plans faithfully been carried out there is every reason to believe that the ecclesiastical polity of Methodism in America would have been identical with that of Methodism in England, which is neither episcopacy in fact, nor in name.

A third argument is based on Wesley's letter appointing Dr. Coke as a superintendent for the American societies. It is claimed by some that this letter affords a basis on which to rest the superstructure of episcopacy in Methodism. The Cincinnati *Western Christian Advocate* recently printed a fac-simile of this letter, to which it prefixed the expressive words, "Genesis of Our Episcopacy." If it means by that to imply that this letter gives authority and endorsement to the system that Coke and Asbury devised, the refutation is contained in the letter itself. We reprint the letter in full below :

*"To all to whom these Presents shall come. John Wesley, late Fellow of Lincoln College in Oxford, Presbyter of the Church of England, sending greeting :*

"Whereas many of the People in the Southern Provinces of North America, who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the Doctrines and Discipline of the Church of England, are greatly distressed for want of ministers to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, according to the usage of said church ; And whereas there does not appear to be any other way of supplying them with ministers :

"Know all men, that I John Wesley think myself to be providentially called, at this time to set apart some persons for the work of the ministry in America. And therefore, under the Protection of Almighty God, and with a single eye to his glory, I have this day set apart as a Superintendent, by the imposition of my hands and prayer (being assisted by other ordained ministers), Thomas Coke, Doctor of Civil Law, a Presbyter of the Church of England, and a man whom I judge to be well qualified for that great work. And I do hereby recommend him to all whom it may concern as a fit person to preside over the Flock of Christ. In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this second day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four.

JOHN WESLEY."

This letter, to which so much importance is attached in this connection, starts out with declarations, as we have previously shown, that put a quietus at once to any interpretation of it containing a purpose to establish an episcopal church in America. It is addressed to those people "who desire to continue under my care, and still adhere to the doctrines and discipline of the Church of England." It assigns as a motive for his action, not a purpose to establish an episcopacy, but to provide for the administration of the sacraments, "according to the usage of the said church."

Where is there any hint of episcopacy in this? To accomplish this purpose he sets apart "some persons"—and that, too, by presbyterial, not episcopal, ordination—"for the work of the ministry in America." He also formally deputizes Dr. Coke to act in his place as superintendent of the American societies, subject, as implied in the preamble, to his own personal direction, and to be recalled or stripped of authority at his direction. This is all.

Coke did not regard this letter, as does, apparently, the *Western Christian Advocate*, as authorizing the institution of an episcopal government for Methodism. He was careful to keep it out of sight. He would not have dared to say, as he did in Asbury's ordination sermon, that Wesley had decided that the Americans should separate from the Church of England and establish an independent episcopal church, if this letter had been before the American preachers. This letter of appointment was suppressed, and appeared to light only after Coke's death, when Drew published it among his other papers.

But we come to the fourth, and most emphasized evidence that Wesley intended to create an episcopacy for American Methodism. Wesley sent over an abridged edition of the prayer-book and liturgy of the Church of England, for the use of American Methodists. In this prayer-book he copied the forms of ritual and ordination made use of by the Church of England, changing however, the form of ordaining a bishop so as to make it read superintendent instead.

Now this abridged prayer-book which Dr. Coke brought over for the use of the American societies was intended by Wesley—as clearly indicated in his declarations—to be used by Methodists, not as a separate, independent episcopal church, but as members of the Church of England. Nothing would be more natural than that he should send the prayer-book and the ritual of the Church of England to those Methodists whom he intended to remain in the Church of England. To distort this act so far from its true meaning as to interpret it in the light of indicating that Wesley intended to establish an independent church on an episcopal basis is to do violence to good judgment as well as to history. This prayer-book was only one more evidence of the fact that Wesley did not intend to organize a new church upon an episcopal basis.

But this prayer-book, of which so much has been made, was not favorably received by the American Church. It was discarded by them, and no thought was given to it until in subsequent years when scurrying around for some argument to uphold the theory

that Wesley was the father of episcopacy, it was resur-rected, that one obscure portion of it might be made use of as a support to this view.

It was not dreamed of by the conference of 1784 that the evidence that Wesley favored episcopacy was to be found in this prayer-book. Dr. Coke, as anxious as he was to fasten and clinch episcopacy upon Methodism, never advanced this idea. McCaine has abundantly proved that the conference of 1784 did not so regard the prayer-book by statements from several of its members. Rev. Jonathan Forest, a member of the conference of 1784, on this point says :

“ As for what Mr. Emory has said in the ‘ Defence of the Fathers,’ respecting the recommendation of the prayer-book abridged by Mr. Wesley being a recommendation of the episcopal form of church government for the American Methodist societies, I did not consider it in that light at the conference of 1784. Nor have I considered it in that light at any time since. Nor do I consider it in that light now. Nor do I believe it was so considered by any person in the conference of 1784.”

Edward Dromgoole, another member of this conference wrote :

“ I do not recollect that there was any proposition for our receiving the prayer-book and the episcopacy connected. And it is certain the preachers never considered themselves obliged to conform to the prayer-book, for they did not make use of it on Wednesdays and Fridays, as recommended.”

Thomas Ware, also a member of this conference, said :

“ Dr. Coke was in favor of taking the name of Methodist Episcopal Church ; argued the plan of general superintendency was in fact species of episcopacy, but did not, I think, bring the prayer-book into view.”

This prayer-book which is advanced as the authority for Wesley's endorsement of episcopacy in the American churches, was also recommended by Wesley for the use of Scotch and English Methodists. Myles, in his "Chronological History of Methodism," says :

"He also recommended to the Scotch Methodists the use of the abridged Common Prayer."

If Wesley recommended episcopacy to American Methodists, then he also recommended it to the societies in Scotland, for he sent them the prayer-book too. He says in the British minutes of the conference of 1786 :

"I at length consented to take the same step with regard to Scotland which I had done with regard to America."

The same prayer-book is used by many Methodists in England to-day. If by sending this book to Americans he intended to signify that they should establish an episcopal church, then he meant that Scotch and English Methodists should do the same. Yet it cannot be denied that English and Scotch Methodists in their non-episcopal church government have more nearly carried out Wesley's wishes. Nobody dreams of accusing them of being false to Wesley's instructions because they have not introduced episcopacy into English and Scotch Methodism.

But this prayer-book argument, if it proved anything on this point, would prove too much. If Wesley's purpose was to make it the vehicle for conveying episcopacy to American Methodists, the kind of episcopacy it recommends would necessarily be that of the Church of England. As Emory admits in his



"Defence of Our Fathers," the forms of ordination here given are an exact reproduction of the forms used in the Church of England. He says :

"The forms recommended to us by Mr. Wesley for ordaining of superintendents, elders and deacons are precisely similar to those used by the Church of England and by the Protestant Episcopal Church in this country for ordaining of bishops, priests and deacons."—*Defence of Our Fathers*, page 69.

But Wesley's repeated declarations prove that he did not believe or accept the episcopacy of the Church of England, however much he admired this church in other respects. He repudiated the episcopal theory of three orders and apostolic succession, as we have heretofore shown. He was a Presbyterian in his view on this subject. Therefore he could not recommend an episcopacy in which he did not believe, and it follows, therefore, that the prayer-book argument falls to the ground. It can have no significance so far as it is supposed to bear on Wesley's desire to institute episcopacy in American Methodism.

But there is room to even doubt whether Wesley ever had anything to do with the insertion of the form for ordination of superintendents in the abridged prayer-book. In a letter to Walter Churchey, from Dublin, June 20, 1789, Wesley says :

"Dr. Coke made two or three little alterations in the prayer-book without my knowledge. I took particular care throughout to alter nothing merely for altering's sake. In religion I am for as few innovations as possible."—*Vol. VII.*, p. 86.

This letter shows that Dr. Coke had taken the liberty of tinkering with the prayer-book unauthorized by Wesley. What these changes were to which Wes-

ley alludes, we do not know. Possibly they had no connection with anything referring to the ordination of a superintendent. Yet it leaves the whole subject open. And it is altogether probable, with his consuming thirst for episcopal dignities, that Dr. Coke might have thrown in a word—for instance, the word ordination instead of appointment or setting apart of superintendents, that would lend countenance to the episcopal theory. Still, the chief significance of the above letter from Wesley is that it shows that Coke was disposed to take matters in his own hands when he had a point to make.

The attempt to make this prayer-book, which the church discarded at the outset of its existence, the ground on which to attribute episcopacy to Wesley, is futile. It is a wild clutching after straws to save a sinking theory. And yet this comes the nearest to the semblance of an argument of anything yet advanced to show that Wesley originated or approved of episcopacy in Methodism.

Notwithstanding the ridiculously slender evidence adduced in favor of the view that makes Wesley the father of episcopacy in American Methodism, and the vast accumulation of evidence against it, nevertheless a remarkable section in the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church attributes to Wesley this very thing. We shall close this pamphlet by giving our attention to some of the circumstances connected with this unique paragraph, its origin, character, etc.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WESLEYAN ORIGIN OF EPISCOPACY — A FABLE CANONIZED.

In the last chapter having previously set forth the arguments sustaining our position, we briefly examined the considerations that have been adduced to sustain the view that Wesley did originate the episcopacy. We noted, first, that the claim that Wesley must have originated episcopacy in American Methodism because he never disclaimed it, was not true ; because, as we have shown, his disapprobation is abundantly established. A second argument, claiming that what Wesley had planned for American Methodism was episcopacy *in fact*, we showed was equally out of harmony with the truth. A third argument, based on Wesley's letter of appointment to Dr. Coke, was seen to be as futile as the others, because the contents of the letter itself are irreconcilable with the theory that Wesley approved of the course taken by Asbury and Coke ; this fact was made apparent also by the action of Dr. Coke, who, recognizing that Wesley's letter was not in harmony with the plan adopted by himself and Asbury, quietly kept the letter out of sight. A fourth argument, based on the abridged prayer-book sent

over by Wesley for the use of American Methodists, we found likewise inconsequential. As Wesley intended American Methodists should remain in the Church of England, this prayer-book was nothing more than a recognition of that fact. Furthermore, early American Methodists never thought of using the prayer-book as an evidence of Wesley's intention to establish an episcopal church for them, and, indeed, discarded it entirely; its resurrection being an afterthought by those who wished to find in it some countenance for the idea that Wesley favored episcopacy for American Methodists. Further, the fact that Wesley gave the same prayer-book to Scotch and English Methodists shows conclusively that he by it no more intended to express his wish to organize American Methodists into an episcopal church in the one case than he did to take the same course with the English and Scotch Methodists in the other. Lastly, the prayer-book argument loses whatever force it might otherwise have had when we take into account Wesley's testimony that Dr. Coke himself was responsible for several alterations in the prayer-book, unauthorized by Wesley.

We find, therefore, that the only evidence adduced in the past one hundred years going to show that Wesley originated the episcopacy introduced into American Methodism is valueless.

Yet in the face of this fact, and in the face of abundant documentary evidence we have presented to show that the episcopacy injected into American Methodism did not have the approval of Wesley, we nevertheless find a remarkable paragraph embodied in

the Book of Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church that puts upon Wesley the responsibility for the transformation of American Methodism into an episcopally governed independent church. Ever since 1792, the Book of Discipline has opened with a section entitled "Origin of the Methodist Episcopal Church," which section is mainly concerned in setting forth the idea that Wesley was the source of the episcopal system introduced into the church. It reads as follows :

"The Preachers and Members of our Society in general being convinced that there was a great deficiency of vital religion in the Church of England in America, and being in many places destitute of Christian Sacraments, as several of the clergy had forsaken their churches, requested the late Rev. John Wesley to take such measures, in his wisdom and prudence, as would afford them suitable relief in their distress. In consequence of this, our venerable friend, who, under God, had been the father of the great revival of religion now extending over the earth by the means of the Methodists, determined to ordain ministers for America ; and for this purpose in the year 1784, sent over three regularly ordained clergymen ; but, preferring the episcopal mode of church government to any other, he solemnly set apart, by the imposition of his hands and prayers, one of them, namely, Thomas Coke, Doctor of Civil Law, late of Jesus College in the University of Oxford, and a Presbyterian of the Church of England, for the episcopal office ; and having delivered to him letters of episcopal orders, commissioned and directed him to set apart Francis Asbury, then General Assistant of the Methodist Society in America, for the same episcopal office, he, the said Francis Asbury, being first ordained deacon and elder. In consequence of which the said Francis Asbury was solemnly set apart for the said episcopal office by prayer and the imposition of the hands of the said Thomas Coke, other regularly ordained ministers assisting in the sacred ceremony. At which

time the General Conference, held at Baltimore, did unanimously receive the said Thomas Coke and Asbury as their bishops, being fully satisfied of the validity of their episcopal ordination."—*Discipline*, 1792.

This singular passage purports to be an account of the "origin of the church." Its chief purpose, however, evidently is to explain the origin of the episcopal character of the church, by making it appear that this was a part of Wesley's original design in regard to American Methodism. From beginning to end the apparent motive is to connect the episcopal system foisted upon American Methodism with Wesley's name and sanction. It affirms that because of his "preferring the episcopal mode of church government to any other," Wesley "solemnly set apart" Dr. Coke "for the episcopal office; and having delivered to him letters of episcopal orders commissioned and directed him to set apart Francis Asbury" for the same episcopal office.

Its purpose evidently was to quiet at once and forever any rising doubts as to the source of episcopal authority and orders in the Methodist Episcopal Church of America. It closes with a sentence that, while it betrays anxiety in regard to the way in which the episcopal claims of "the said Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury" may be received, is yet intended to convey the idea that the General Conference of 1784 was "fully satisfied of the validity of their episcopal ordination."

How and when did this remarkable declaration appear? Who was its author, and what was the occasion of its production?

We have to some extent answered these questions already. Coke and Asbury would have failed in carrying the American preachers with them if they had revealed that the step they were taking was in opposition to Wesley's wishes. Coke alone was supposed to be fully acquainted with Wesley's plans. His statements, connected with the fact that he was the undoubted ambassador sent over to carry out Wesley's recommendations, was sufficient to satisfy the American preachers that they were acquiescing to Wesley's plans in establishing an independent Episcopal Church, and accepting Coke and Asbury as their bishops. And that Coke did not hesitate to thus misrepresent Wesley, even although he carried in his pocket documents in Wesley's own writing that contradicted the doctor's public statements, we have already shown.

Thus the impression created among the American preachers that episcopacy in American Methodism was Wesley's off-spring became an accepted fact by them, and a tradition in the church. But this fathering of episcopacy upon Wesley did not find expression in the Discipline until after Wesley's death. The expression used in this section of the Discipline refers to Wesley as "the late Rev. John Wesley," showing that it was framed subsequent to Wesley's death. On this point McCaine says :

"It was not written when the church was organized, for it is not found in the minutes of that conference, nor is it in the Book of Discipline which was printed in 1788 by Sheppard Kollock, of Elizabeth Town. The fact is it was not written until after Mr. Wesley's death, an event which took place seven years after the church was organized. The church was organized in

1784. Mr. Wesley died the 2d of March, 1791, and this section speaks of him as 'the late Rev. John Wesley,' evidently carrying in itself internal marks of fraud."—McCaine's "*Letters on the Methodist Episcopal Church*," page 97.

Why was it that this clause did not appear in the Discipline until after Wesley's death? Taking all we have previously given into account, it would appear that such a declaration put in that conspicuous form would have been likely to meet the eyes of Mr. Wesley, and would have drawn from him some contradiction. Wesley died in 1791, seven years after the organization of the church. According to the best accounts this section appeared first in the Discipline in 1792, immediately following Wesley's death. Commenting on this fact McCaine says:

"There is no document written before Mr. Wesley's death which ascribes the episcopal form of church government to him, his 'counsel,' advice or 'recommendation'; but as soon as ever death had imposed silence on his tongue, and his hand had been rendered incapable of contradicting their statements, then do these reverend bishops ascribe the mode of church government to him, and pass it off on the credulous Methodists under the sanction of Mr. Wesley's name."

Coke in his journal gives a paragraph that throws some light upon the genesis of this section in the Discipline. He states that at the Georgia Conference in 1789 it was agreed that Wesley's name should be inserted in the "Small Minutes"—not the Discipline—"as the foundation of our episcopal office." Once getting formal expression in the annual conference minutes—not so likely to fall under the eyes of Wesley—it is easy to see how, when Wesley died, that this



declaration that he was the father of episcopacy would be exalted to a place in the Discipline. Coke's account runs thus :

“ On the 9th of March (1789) we began our conference in Georgia. Here we agreed (as we have ever since in each of the conferences) that Mr. Wesley's name should be inserted at the head of our small minutes, and also in our form of Discipline. In the Small Minutes as the fountain of our episcopal office, and in the form of Discipline as the father of the whole work under the divine guidance. To this all the conferences have cheerfully and unanimously agreed.—*Coke's Journal*, page 106.

This paragraph would seem to show that Coke was the most active party in formulating the statement that Wesley was responsible for episcopacy. Whether he penned the section in the Discipline setting forth this idea, or whether it was done by some one else, we do not know. Enough is known, however, to demonstrate that both Coke and Asbury willingly profited by the impression generally received by the American preachers, that episcopacy was a part of Wesley's plan.

One other fact may have contributed to the appearance of this section in the Discipline at about this date. It will be remembered that Asbury attempted to supplant the General Conference by a Council, consisting of a few presiding elders of his own selection. The opposition to this attempt reached its culmination in 1792, when the General Conference, through O'Kelley's efforts, was restored to power. It would be nothing more than to be expected that all the use possible would be made of the conviction, which Coke had so diligently created, that Wesley had devised the episcopacy. It would be natural that, in

order to hold in check the republican movement started by O'Kelley, the frightened upholders of episcopacy would seek to use all the weight that there was in Wesley's name and influence to give sanction to the episcopal office and authority. This could be made no more effective than to enshrine that declaration at the very threshold of the Discipline as the foundation stone on which the church rested.

McCaine takes this view of it. He says on this point :

" Wesley's alleged recommendation was an after-thought, which it was supposed would silence the objections of Mr. O'Kelley and others against Mr. Asbury's assumption of such episcopal powers as caused the split in the church in 1792, and would establish the right of Methodist bishops to exercise these powers *in extenso*, however oppressive or tyrannical they might appear."—*Letters on the Methodist Episcopal Church*, page 39.

However it may be accounted for, it remains as a matter of fact that this misleading declaration, false to fact and false to history, was embalmed in the place of honor in the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. There it stands to-day, a fable apotheosized, a monumental testimony to the weakness of great minds, the canonization of error intended to mislead, the evidence of the unscrupulous ambition of the first American bishops and of the over-credulity of the early Methodist preachers.

These words may seem harsh, but we can not think them more so than the circumstances warrant. Nor are they more than some candid minds in the Methodist Episcopal Church are ready to admit, in the light of the facts of history.

In the *Methodist Review* for January and Febru-

ary, 1892, there is an article by Dr. William F. Warren, President of Boston University, the leading educational institution of the Methodist Episcopal Church, entitled, "The Portico to Our Book of Discipline." This article treats of the very section of the Discipline which we are considering. President Warren records his objections to allowing this section to remain any longer in the Methodist Book of Discipline, and urges the General Conference of 1892 to remove this century-standing record of error from the book. In assigning his reasons for so doing, he pens the following significant words touching this section :

" It misleads the reader, giving him to understand that our episcopal form of organization was a result of Wesley's predilection alone, and that Asbury's consecration to the episcopal office was ascribable solely to Wesley's choice. The fourth and final sentence confirms this misconception, for it seems to represent the total action of the American preachers as a mere acquiescence in what had been done in their behalf."

Here we have, in the foremost periodical of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from the pen of one of the highest living authorities in that church, a confirmation of what we have said. Here it is admitted that this long-standing perversion of history " misleads the reader," because it has fostered the tradition " that our episcopal organization was a result of Wesley's predilection alone, and that Asbury's consecration to the episcopal office was ascribable solely to Wesley's choice." This is very cautiously worded, but it conveys a meaning even stronger than that contained in the words themselves, because it indicates the presence of a conviction that this section of the Discipline to

which it refers is untrustworthy in the light of history, and yet without attempting to measure the extent of that untrustworthiness.

Dr. Warren then goes on to present a substitute for this section of the Book of Discipline, in which he relieves Wesley from the burden of having originated the episcopal system in American Methodism, and attributes to the independent action of the American preachers themselves the place which the Discipline previously assigned to Wesley.

We have now concluded our discussion on the relation of Wesley to episcopacy in American Methodism. We are not disposed to underrate the great work that Methodism under episcopal direction has accomplished in this country. Neither are we disposed to overlook whatever commendable things can be urged in favor of the episcopal system on its merits. We do not dispute the right and privilege of American Methodists to establish any kind of an ecclesiastical organization that they chose. The simple purpose of these articles has been to show that it is historically false to attribute episcopacy in American Methodism to Wesley, and that the American preachers were misled in the interest of ambition and vanity when they were induced to give their credence to this tradition.

That the great Methodist Episcopal Church may put itself right with history, in accordance with Dr. Warren's suggestion, is a wish in which, we think, all candid minds will concur.

